

## **Site Tour Summary – April 18, 2007**

### **Bidwell Ranch Mitigation Bank Project**

#### **Site Tour Time, Location, and Purpose**

River Partners conducted two site tours on the Bidwell Ranch Mitigation Bank Project Site (Project Site) on Wednesday, April 18<sup>th</sup> from 1:00 – 3:15 pm and 3:30 – 5:00 pm. The site tours allowed members of the Citizen Work Group to become acquainted with the Project Site and potential issues. Issues include finding recreational uses that may be compatible with the site as a protected area, erosion issues along the Sycamore Creek Diversion Channel, and the management of the bank once it is created. The site tour provides interested members of the Citizen Work Group an opportunity to provide input on the Project.

#### **Site Tour Overview**

The tour began at the entrance gate just off of Upper Park Road. Dan Efseaff and Tom Griggs of River Partners led the group on a loop of the southern part of the property. Participants in the tour posed questions, offered suggestions, and shared information about the Project Site. The group discussed a wide range of topics including the area's ecology, resources, and history. Thirteen people attended the site tours, including members of the Sierra Club, Bidwell Ranch Conservancy, Big Chico Creek Watershed Alliance, and the general public.

During the tour, participants observed vernal pool, swale, and annual grassland habitats. Although a dry year, many representative vernal pool plants were blooming. These plants included ornate downingia (*Downingia ornatissima*), annual hairgrass (*Deschampsia danthonioides*), wooly marbles (*Psilocarphus* sp.), vernal pool foxtail (*Alopecurus saccatus*), and vernal pool mint (*Pogogyne* sp.). The group observed various bird species, including a flock of tree swallows (*Tachycineta bicolor*) mobbing a red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*). The group also observed native bees pollinating navarretia (*Navarretia* sp.), a flowering plant found in vernal pools. The group also observed evidence of topographical changes including erosion along the Sycamore Creek Diversion Channel and evidence of a historic road.

#### **Workgroup Comments and Questions**

Participants identified a number of issues and suggestions

- What are the definitions of and different types of vernal pools? What types of vernal pools would be good for mitigation? Would there be created habitat onsite or strictly enhancement and preservation if the Project Site becomes a mitigation bank? What is the ratio of naturally occurring vernal pools versus potential artificially created vernal pools onsite?
- How will the future cattle management of the Project Site differ from the current management? Did the low rainfall year keep the cattle in the vernal pools for a longer period of time, potentially damaging the resource? Would water sources brought in earlier have minimized any potential damage?

- What will happen to the current fencing?
- What effects does the altered topography from historic land uses have on the natural hydrology of the Project Site?
- What is the effect of the diversion channel on site erosion and hydrology?
- How does water flow across the Project Site during the wet season?
- What are historical land uses of the Project Site?
- How do activities in Bidwell Park affect the Project Site?
- What is the influence of the Sycamore Creek Diversion Channel on amphibians?

Participates also suggested that River Partners consider measures to:

- Integrate the management of Bidwell Ranch with Bidwell Park management.
- Note the hydrology of the Project Site during the winter to get a better idea of the dynamics of the site.
- Use the old road onsite along Sycamore Creek Diversion Channel as an access point.
- Preserve the variety within the landscape.
- Research the age of the geologic formations and soils onsite.
- Get background from the Chico Historical Society.

These capture only some of the comments brought up during the meeting. River Partners will research and address pertinent issues in the next few months in the Site Inventory and other upcoming documents.

## **Next Steps**

A Site Inventory is currently being conducted and will include information on the land-use history, biological resources, and physical characteristics of the Project Site. Associated studies such as an updated wetlands delineation and cultural resource evaluation will be an important part of the next phase. The Site Inventory should be completed in summer 2007, and members of the Citizen Work Group will receive a briefing and an opportunity to comment on the document.

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