

BIDWELL PARK REFLECTIONS

FALL 2009

Friends of Bidwell Park (FOBP) have been busy over the summer, expanding the plant inventory of the park, working with City Staff on the Bidwell Park Vegetation Management Plan, compiling information for a series of docent-led Park tours and helping the Chico Creek Nature Center prepare for the grand opening of their new Center next spring.

This fall we're continuing these projects but we will also begin to encourage the Bidwell Park and Playground Commission and City of Chico to start implementation of portions of ALL aspects of the Bidwell Park Master Management Plan (BPMMP) that was adopted over 10 months ago. We must make sure that after all the time and money that was spent on writing and analyzing the BPMMP, it is not largely ignored (as was the prior management plan).

We will be asking the City and Park Commission for a monthly report on what goals and objectives are being worked on and which are being accomplished. We will post this information on our website so park users can see how park funding and staff time is being distributed.

Of course, we understand the City does not have the financial means to implement many portions of the plan at once, but this must not be used as an excuse to be unbalanced regarding the needs of all different kinds of

park users and sustaining the park's natural and cultural resources.

For example, the vast majority of park users are hikers, bikers and equestrians. Yet there is still no serious discussion by the City and Park Commission which could lead to a coherent, comprehensive trail plan that adequately addresses the extensive, degraded and neglected trail system in Middle and Upper Park. Year after year, the trail system deteriorates more, degrading

the natural environment through soil erosion, invasions of non-native species and loss of native wildflowers and wildlife. A recently awarded Federal grant will only upgrade a small portion of one Upper Park trail.

Another example is the lack of a rigorous invasive plant removal/management program. Ignoring the spread of certain invasive species is resulting in the complete loss of native species in large areas of the Park. The olive trees that grow on the south side of the Bidwell Golf Course prohibit the

growth of any other species under their canopy. Olives are spreading in Upper Park at an alarming rate; they will continue to alter the entire ecosystem. Still, not a single city representative (City Staff, Park Commissioner or City Council Member) has initiated discussion on the issue. The City has done very little to raise public awareness of this problem.



Plant Inventory Update

Bidwell Park super-volunteer Lowell Ahart has collected over 400 plant specimens in Bidwell Park since receiving his collecting permit last fall! Lowell's collections are from Lower Park and from the two parcels acquired on the south side of Big Chico Creek in the early 1990's, which are areas not covered by the collections of Vern Oswald, who wrote the flora of Upper Park in 1986 (now out of print). An inventory of the plant species in Lower Park has never been conducted before. Unfortunately, aside from some native tree species, most of the plant species observed thus far in Lower Park are non-native to California and come from many parts of the world. Many of these non-native species have escaped from the gardens of adjacent homes into the Park's riparian woodland, while others came from the 1900's Experimental Forestry Station and World of Trees plantings. Some species like English ivy and vinca have become extremely invasive and have excluded natives from large areas of Lower Park.



The plant collections from the south side of Upper Park reveal a rich diversity of native wildflowers, native grasses and ferns as well as a number of non-native annual grassland species. All specimens collected are being deposited in the Herbarium at California State University, Chico. Lowell is also collecting specimens of mosses and lichens and sending them to specialists for identification. These collections are valuable because they help us understand the species that inhabit Bidwell Park and how species composition is changing in response to climate change, competition from non-native species and habitat fragmentation. We are planning another extensive collecting

season in 2010. We hope to help write and publish a series of booklets about Bidwell Park's plants in 2011.

For those interested in learning more about the Bidwell Park's plant life, watch the FOBP website for the posting of the draft plant list of Bidwell Park.

Disc Golf Update

Although the City originally voted to keep intensive developed recreation facilities out of Upper Park when they adopted the new Bidwell Park Master Management Plan last November, political pressure swayed the City Council to reverse their previous decision. They have now allowed two 18-hole disc golf courses to be built on the shallowest soils on one of the most aesthetically attractive landscape settings in the entire park.

At this time, the City and disc golf group are working together to develop a Memorandum of Understanding regarding the development and maintenance of the course. Unfortunately these meetings have been behind closed doors and other stakeholders have not been invited to participate. Even the Park Commissioners have yet to be informed about the details of the proposed MOU or even who is representing the disc golfers. Currently there are still no mitigations implemented or in place and unmitigated damage continues. The Park Commission still has not written and adopted an enforceable wet weather policy for the disc golf area. This must be in place before the rains start if the Commission and City want to stop the unabated soil erosion and compaction that is occurring throughout large portions of the courses. We will keep the public informed as to whether or not the City complies with the all the legal mitigations and monitoring they promised to do when they approved the project.

Chico Creek Nature Center Update

The Chico Creek Nature Center is busy working on the construction of the new exhibits which will be installed over the next few months. The new building and Nature Lab will have their grand opening this spring and the new Center will be open on a daily basis.

Vegetation Plan Update

Earlier this year, FOBP helped the park's volunteer coordinator prepare the annual vegetation management report as well as set the priorities for next year's vegetation projects. We recently donated \$500 to the Park Division to help pay the salary of the park intern who supervises many of the park's volunteer invasive plant removal sessions. We're currently identifying and documenting many potential invasive-removal projects in the park to aid the volunteer coordinator so that as she recruits organizations and individuals to work in the park, she will be able to offer projects to them that are suitable for their needs and abilities. However, because the city has not allocated any specific funding for vegetation management outside of the volunteer program, many of the high-priority projects cannot be attempted, since these projects are not appropriate for volunteers.

TANC Update

Fortunately, the proposal to install additional high voltage power lines and towers in Upper Park was dropped. Another development which would have further degraded the recreation quality and natural beauty of the park has been avoided.

Bidwell Park Docent-led Tours

FOBP have been researching historical documents, various reports, and CSU Chico student research projects to develop a set of 12 docent-led tours throughout the Park. The purpose for creating and giving these tours is to preserve and increase knowledge of the Park's history, to raise consciousness of Chico residents about the Park's natural resources and their conservation and to provide useful information for Park visitors, City Staff, Park Commissioners, Park Staff, Park Rangers, Park volunteers and those who have an interest in knowing more about their surroundings. These tours will be offered through the Chico Creek Nature Center and will also help the Center develop nature and cultural education programs for teenagers and adults.

Outstanding Park Volunteer Passes Away

John Copeland, a special friend and long-time dedicated Bidwell Park volunteer, died on August 25, 2009 at the age of 90. John, also a former Park Commissioner (September 1984 – June 1993), deeply loved the Park and, as a member of the California Native Plant Society's Mt Lassen Chapter, for decades led "Broom Bashing" trips in Upper Park to help control the spread of the highly invasive Spanish Broom shrubs. He was also an avid volunteer for FOBP, spending hundreds of hours removing invasive privet and hackberry trees from Lower Park. Anyone who has done weed eradication knows this is physically hard and tedious work, yet John, until very recently, kept coming back to help, with a smile. John's love for Bidwell Park is evidenced by his enthusiasm, devotion, and tireless dedication to protecting the Park's natural beauty. He will be sorely missed and fondly remembered.



Annie's Glen Pine St. Bike Underpass and Bridge across Big Chico Creek

Within the next few months, the bike/pedestrian underpass and bridge connecting Annie's Glen to Lower Park and Camellia Way Park will be completed. \$400,000 of the funding was provided by a Safe Routes to School grant and the other \$1.1 million from bikeway facilities development impact fees. It was in May 2004 when FOBP first met with city staff at Annie's Glen to discuss possible solutions to the access/connectivity problems in this area, illicit activities and overgrown vegetation. Since then, thousands of volunteer hours were spent improving the Glen. The underpass and bridge will make Annie's Glen much more accessible to the public as well as providing a missing link in the city's bike plan. FOBP are proud to have helped initiate and facilitate this important project and we hope more people enjoy this small but integral part of Lower Park.



Park Commission and City negotiating new lease with Bidwell Park Golf Club

The City of Chico is in the process of negotiating a new 25-year lease with the Bidwell Park Golf Club, a non-profit organization that operates the Bidwell Park Golf Course. They hope to have this new lease finalized by the end of the year. According to staff reports, the new lease will "address the long term operational and capital improvement needs of the Bidwell Municipal Golf Course" and "address performance standards."

FOBP will be working with the City to help ensure other issues are considered, such as the removal of invasive plant species that are spreading from the course area into the rest of the park and improving the reporting and monitoring of chemicals used on the site. FOBP would also like the City to consider improving recreation access along the south side, with a new short segment of the Annie Bidwell Trail, and extending the creekside trail from the golf course to the Yahi Trail on the north side.

New Bathrooms on North Side of One Mile Recreation Area

Work recently started on new permanent bathrooms to replace the portable toilets on the north side of the One Mile parking lot. Most of this \$182,000 project is funded by Chico's per capita share of California's Prop 40 funding, with the remainder coming from the General Fund.

Butte Environmental Council's Bidwell Park and Creeks of Chico Clean Up

This annual cleanup will be held on September 19th from 9 am to 1:30 pm. See www.becnet.org for details. As part of our participation in this event, FOBP volunteers walk most of the urban sections of Little Chico Creek, Big Chico Creek, Lindo Channel and Sycamore Creek to provide pre-cleanup surveys of trashed areas and homeless camps. This information is used to assign volunteers on the cleanup day. We're pleased to report that there is much less trash on the creeks that we've surveyed so far this year as compared to 7 years ago when we began to provide this service. This is in large part due to the city's year-old program to check creek "hotspots" on a biweekly basis so that small problems don't become big problems. Kudos to all of the city departments that participate in this effort!

Contact Information:

Friends of Bidwell Park
P.O. Box 3036
Chico, CA 95926

www.friendsofbidwellpark.org

info@friendsofbidwellpark.org