

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DESCRIPTION OF THE PARK

Bidwell-Sacramento River State Park (Park), referred to by local residents as “River Park,” is located along the banks of the Sacramento River near the community of Chico in the northern Sacramento Valley (see Exhibit 1-1). The Park is organized into four non-contiguous subunits totaling approximately 210 acres: (1) Irvine Finch River Access, (2) Pine Creek Landing, (3) Indian Fishery, and (4) Big Chico Creek Riparian Area (see Exhibit 2-1).

The Irvine Finch River Access area is a small subunit (approx. 5 acres) representing the northernmost extension of the Park. It represents the most developed recreation area of the Park and includes an entrance station/information kiosk, boat launch, picnic tables, permanent restroom facilities, and an approximately 250-space paved parking area for automobiles, boat trailers, and recreation vehicles (RVs). Recreational opportunities available at Irvine Finch include boating (i.e., motor-boating, kayaking, canoeing, inner-tubing), fishing (facilitated by boat launching opportunities), en-route camping (it is the only subunit that permits overnight camping), and day use/picnicking. Many visitors use the facilities at Irvine Finch to begin their sport-fishing and river-floating experience.

The Pine Creek Landing subunit consists of two long and narrow discontinuous properties (approx. 5 acres) located along Pine Creek, a tributary to the Sacramento River, and is the northernmost property on the east side of the river in Butte County. It is served by several access points off of River Road. The main facility is a joint boat launch and day-use area. This area contains a concrete boat launch, paved parking area, and concrete picnic tables/pads; a vault restroom facility is planned. To the south, there are three additional pull-out areas on the west side of River Road that serve this subunit. These are basically undeveloped areas, fenced and marked as State Park property, with limited facilities, such as picnic tables, informal trails, and an interpretive panel that represents the approximate location of the Bidwell Ferry site. Recreation uses at Pine Creek Landing include boating (both motor-boating and kayaking/canoeing), fishing, picnicking, hiking/walking, and nature viewing.

The Indian Fishery subunit (approx. 101 acres) is characterized by large expanses of native riparian habitat and is located, in part, adjacent to an oxbow lake formed by the meander of the Sacramento River. This area contains the Park’s most prominent picnic area and a small loop trail that provides opportunities for hiking, walking, nature and wildlife viewing, and other passive recreation activities. Although not located directly on the river, this subunit provides river access via volunteer trails, and thus, indirectly provides bank fishing opportunities. In addition, the Park’s administration facilities, which consist of several modular buildings, are located here.

The Big Chico Creek subunit (approx. 97 acres) represents the southernmost extension of the Park. This area contains abundant native riparian vegetation. The property is transected by River Road, with river access and portions of a gravel bar created by the river’s meander on

the east side of the road. Active habitat restoration is occurring on the west side of the road, with no developed facilities available. The gravel bar area is a popular location for bank fishing and non-motorized boat or inner-tube takeout. Other recreation uses available include trail use, nature viewing, swimming, sunbathing, and picnicking (at undeveloped locations). Access to the gravel bar area is controlled by a gate, which is locked during the winter months (due to flooding) and when necessary to control unauthorized use and vandalism.

APPROACH TO THE PRELIMINARY GENERAL PLAN

Although the Park was formally classified as a State Park in 1990, a general plan has yet to be developed. Moreover, potential property additions to the Park (i.e., Beard Property, Sunset Ranch, and Singh Orchard), as well as proximity to abundant conservation-oriented lands managed by other State and federal agencies and public-interest organizations, have elevated the need to establish the future vision of the Park through the development of a formal general plan, which will guide future management direction at the Park over an approximate 20-year planning horizon.

The Preliminary General Plan (Plan) for the Park reflects the California Department of Parks and Recreation's (Department's) dual mandates as the steward of sensitive ecological resources and the provider of recreation opportunities, all in the context of the network of public lands in the project area. The protection and restoration of natural and cultural resources are key components of the Plan. The Plan allows for additional biological habitat restoration and water quality protection; preserves scenic and cultural resources; and calls for facility developments and improvements in response to local and regional demand, yet with consideration given to physical and environmental constraints.

The Plan also addresses key planning issues that have been identified during the planning process. These issues include definition of a purpose and vision for the Park; renaming of the Park; resource protection and management; recreational opportunity/visitor service enhancement; interpretation; facility development; operational improvements; and property acquisition/park expansion.

In the context of the general plan process, a revised Declaration of Purpose is proposed and a new Vision would be established to reflect current conditions, including knowledge of the resources at the Park and planning actions being undertaken in the project area, and to more succinctly state the understood significance and value of the Park with respect to California and the State Park system.

The Plan considers the appropriate carrying capacity of the Park both to protect its resources and to provide high-quality visitor experiences. It emphasizes the importance of long-term sustainability, the use of environmental indicators, and adaptive management practices.

The Plan provides the parkwide goals and guidelines that would direct short- and long-term management decisions and environmental stewardship in the Park. It is acknowledged that

the stated purpose and vision in the Plan would be achieved incrementally, as funding becomes available, and would be reached over time through the efforts of Department staff and the community.

STEPS IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

A thorough analysis of existing conditions was the first step undertaken as part of the planning process. The District and other interested agencies, along with individuals and nonprofit groups, provided information about the conditions at the Park. A geographic information system (GIS) compiles much of the information collected about the resources present at the Park and was used to help make informed decisions regarding environmental constraints to development. Existing conditions and preliminary planning issues were presented at a public workshop held in March 2003 to inform the public about the planning process and to explore ideas for Park enhancements and different visions for the Park's future. Public and agency scoping efforts also identified important issues that are addressed in the Plan.

Subsequently, the Department developed alternatives for consideration in the development of a preferred General Plan alternative. These three alternatives presented different options for resolving existing issues of resource management and visitor use for the Park and to represent a range of management treatments (i.e., minimum, moderate, and maximum) for natural and recreational resources at the Park. These three alternatives were presented to the public and resource agencies in July 2003 for their review and feedback. Features of each of these alternatives were used to develop the preferred General Plan alternative, which was further refined through the development of parkwide goals and guidelines presented in the Plan and a land use and facility map that depicts approximate locations of proposed facility developments and other improvements.

The third major step in the planning process is environmental analysis. The Plan includes an environmental impact report (EIR) that identifies the potential environmental effects of the General Plan, consistent with the requirements of CEQA. Because the Plan establishes resource-specific management goals and guidelines, it in essence serves as a "self-mitigating" plan, designed to avoid, reduce, or minimize environmental impacts of the proposed implementation of the Plan to a less-than-significant level whenever possible. The opportunity for public review of this Preliminary General Plan and Draft EIR is provided during the CEQA review process.

SUMMARY AND STRUCTURE OF THE PLAN

The General Plan is composed of three main sections: (1) Existing Conditions and Issues; (2) Park Plan; and (3) Environmental Analysis.

The Existing Conditions and Issues component of the General Plan (Chapter 2) describes the current physical and social conditions at the Park. This includes information on land use; significant physical, biotic, cultural, aesthetic, and recreational values; and existing facilities and operational parameters. It also describes systemwide and regional planning influences

affecting the Park, describes the demographic profile of local resident and representative visitors, and lists issues that have been identified during the planning process and are addressed in the General Plan.

The Park Plan (Chapter 3) presents the Purpose and Vision for the Park, which serve as overarching guidelines for future management directives. It also presents a set of parkwide goals and guidelines that apply to all geographic areas of the Park. The goals and guidelines create a management framework that would protect existing natural and cultural resources while establishing needed visitor support facilities and a program for enhancing and interpreting the Park's resource values. These goals and guidelines are organized into three main categories: (1) environmental resource management, (2) visitor use and opportunities, and (3) administration and operations.

In addition to the goals and guidelines, the Plan provides a spatial dimension to Park planning through the use of area concept planning, which includes area-specific management and facility prescriptions for the various subunits that comprise Bidwell-Sacramento River State Park. Proposed facility developments are also presented in the land use and facility plan developed for the Park (see Exhibit 3-1). The following list summarizes potential facilities and developments considered for Bidwell-Sacramento River State Park:

Irvine Finch Recreation Area (includes Irvine Finch River Access and Beard Addition)

- ▶ Regular maintenance of the Irvine Finch boat ramp to accommodate larger vessels.
- ▶ New overnight campground, including family and group campsites, at the Beard Addition.
- ▶ Parking expansion to serve day-users, boaters, and overnight campers.

Sunset Ranch Addition

- ▶ New administrative center (relocated from Indian Fishery).
- ▶ New day-use area.
- ▶ New visitor center that could serve multiple public land managers.
- ▶ Potential for new multi-agency loop trail and associated trailhead.

Pine Creek Landing

- ▶ Ongoing maintenance of existing boat launch facility.
- ▶ Provision of additional parking as demand warrants based on the availability of land.

Indian Fishery

- ▶ Relocation of existing administrative center to a more centralized location.
- ▶ New day-use area at the location of the existing administrative center.
- ▶ Ongoing operation and use of existing day-use area.
- ▶ Expansion of existing loop trail system to the southern portion of the subunit.

Big Chico Creek Riparian Area (includes Singh Orchard Addition)

- ▶ Car-top boat access area along Big Chico Creek.
- ▶ Environmental (or primitive) campground east of River Road.
- ▶ Expansion of fishing access through improvements to existing entrance road.
- ▶ Loop trail system and trailhead that would connect all properties.

The proposed land use and facilities plan for the Park recommends the development of recreational and administrative facilities throughout the Park, including potential property additions. Because these properties are not currently owned by the Department, there exists the potential that facilities proposed on these properties may not ultimately be developed at these particular locations. Because many of these facilities and/or improvements have been identified by the Department as being integral to the future development of the Park in terms of meeting visitor needs and promoting the vision of the Park, a set of site-selection criteria has been developed that will allow the Department to evaluate other Park locations and/or potential property additions for their appropriateness for certain types of facilities and developments.

In compliance with CEQA, an evaluation of the potential for significant environmental impacts is provided in Chapter 4. The environmental analysis is based on the physical effects that would result from implementation of the Plan, including management actions in pursuit of the goals and guidelines and the proposed land use and facilities plan. The goals and guidelines contained in Chapter 3 (Park Plan) seek to avoid potentially significant effects on the environment whenever possible. For the most part, implementation of the General Plan, in conjunction with compliance with applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, is not expected to result in significant impacts on the environment. The one exception is a significant and unavoidable environmental impact related to the conversion of designated Important Farmland to non-agricultural uses. Several of the proposed property additions are designated as Important Farmland, and if they are added to the Park, they would be removed from agricultural production. This represents a significant environmental impact, and because no feasible mitigation measures are available, it is considered significant and unavoidable.

The environmental analysis prepared for the Preliminary General Plan (Chapter 4) is programmatic in scope and does not contain project-specific analysis for the facilities recommended in the Plan. However, the plan also includes guidelines that govern project-level environmental review of area-specific projects to avoid or minimize any potential adverse site-specific effects to some resources during construction or operation of the facilities. Specific projects would undergo subsequent CEQA review in the future as appropriate.