

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE PARK

Bidwell-Sacramento River State Park (Park) lies in the heart of the Sacramento Valley, flanking the banks of the river on which it depends. The Park is organized into four subunits totaling approximately 210 acres: (1) Irvine Finch River Access Area, (2) Pine Creek Landing, (3) Indian Fishery, and (4) Big Chico Creek Riparian Area.

The Park is characterized by lush valley oak riparian woodland and other riparian communities, including unique ecological associations, providing habitat to several special-status species. In addition to its valuable natural resources, the Park possesses outstanding opportunities for river-oriented recreation. Recreational opportunities range from quiet nature walking, fishing, picnicking and biking, to paddling, floating, and motorized boating along the Sacramento River and its tributaries.

### 1.1.1 PROJECT LOCATION

The Park, commonly referred to by locals as “River Park,” is located approximately 6 miles west of the City of Chico, and approximately 90 miles north of Sacramento, and 170 miles northeast of San Francisco (Exhibit 1-1). All but one subunit lie on the east side of the Sacramento River in Butte County; they are Pine Creek Landing, Indian Fishery, and the Big Chico Creek Riparian Area. At the northern end of the Park, the Irvine Finch subunit is situated on the west side of the river in Glenn County.

Several local roadways provide direct access to the Park. Access to eastern subunits of the Park is provided by River Road, a County-maintained road, which runs in a north-south alignment adjacent to various subunits located along the eastern banks of the Sacramento River and its tributaries. Access to the Irvine Finch subunit on the west side of the river is provided by State Route 32, which travels in an east-west direction just north of the Park. From nearby community of Chico, West Sacramento Avenue runs into River Road thereby linking the downtown Chico area to the Park.

### PURPOSE FOR ACQUISITION AND HISTORY OF BIDWELL-SACRAMENTO RIVER STATE PARK

A rich history lies behind the present-day Park, beginning with the Maidu Native Americans, who exploited the large diversity of botanical and faunal resources fostered by the marshland/riparian environment along the Sacramento River and its tributaries. Early Settlers used the site to construct a ferry landing, allowing goods to be transported from one river bank to the other. Eventually ownership came to John and Annie Bidwell, who largely influenced the development of the greater Chico area.

The progression of Park ownership from the Bidwell family to the State occurred over the last century and is described in the Interpretive Prospectus (1997) prepared for the Park. In 1908, Annie Bidwell deeded land to the State of California (State Forestry Service) to protect

Exhibit 1-1 Regional Vicinity Map

tree growth along the wooded riparian banks of the Sacramento River and its tributaries, to minimize the diversion and use of the water for private purposes, and to minimize the loss of water to maintain natural hydrological conditions and the natural beauty of the waterways. Prior to this, in 1882, John Bidwell conveyed roughly 11 acres to the County of Butte to build roads in an effort to provide access to the river. Due to the possible overlapping areas in deeds and conveyances, and the resultant clouding of titles between the State and the County, a decision was made in 1950 that the State would convey its land holdings to the County and thereby merge the deeds. Because the County did not want to develop a parks and recreation program at the time, it leased portions of the land to the Chico Area Recreation and Park District, who in turn leased nearly all the property to a rod and gun club. By the 1960s, boundary disputes with neighboring landowners frustrated efforts at developing a master facilities plan. Hunting, shooting, wood-cutting, dumping, and the intrusion of off-road vehicles defiled the park area. In 1972, at the request of petitioning local government, the California Department of Parks and Recreation (the Department) was mandated by the State legislature to study alternative methods to preserve what had become referred to as "Bidwell River Park." A resulting 1974 report recommended that Bidwell River Park be re-acquired by the State as part of the State Park System. A 1977 state bill authorized the acquisition of the park, and on August 1, 1979, the park was transferred into the State Park System. It was not until 1990 that it was named and classified as Bidwell-Sacramento River State Park.

### **1.1.2 SPIRIT OF PLACE**

The spirit of Bidwell-Sacramento River State Park is that of a river experience. The characteristics of the Park, including its location along the banks of the Sacramento River and its tributaries, make this a place of recreation, inspiration, and renewal. The Park provides different ways of enjoying the river and surrounding riparian habitat, catering to a diverse visitor base. In a physical sense, the river provides active recreational opportunities on the water. For example, the heat of the summer brings many river recreationists to the Park to float down the river, while later in the fall, it becomes a popular river access point for anglers fishing the salmon run. More passive recreation opportunities, such as hiking and nature walks along the river banks, are also enjoyed by Park visitors. The rich history and physical characteristics of the Park also serve interpretive and educational interests, and based on its close proximity to the river, the Park allows visitors to experience the natural functions of an evolving river system, including river meandering, sediment deposition, and flooding. In an inspirational sense, the natural environment of the Park and relatively low use levels during non-summer months are conducive to those visitors seeking peace and solitude.

## **1.2 PURPOSE OF THIS GENERAL PLAN**

### **1.2.1 GENERAL PLAN AND THE STATE PARK PLANNING PROCESS**

This General Plan is meant to serve as a long-range management tool that provides guidelines for achieving the defined purposes of the Park. By defining a purpose and vision with long-term goals and guidelines, it provides the framework for a unit's development,

ongoing management, and public use. This framework serves as the basis for developing more detailed management and site-specific project plans.

The General Plan identifies and analyzes important park resources, provides guidelines for their preservation and management, and makes proposals for their appreciation through recreation and interpretation. It proposes improvements to attain expected compatible land uses, and describes the nature and general location of future developments. It outlines future operational needs and also provides an assessment of the potential cumulative environmental impacts as a result of the plan's implementation.

The role of the General Plan is not to provide detailed management recommendations, but rather to establish parameters for future planning of specific management actions. After a unit's General Plan is completed and approved, management plans are typically developed that give more specific direction on individual resources, issues, or programs. The General Plan also provides the context for defining and evaluating specific development and management plans. These specific development and management plans may require additional data collection and review processes to ensure adherence to the goals and guidelines established within this General Plan.

## **PLANNING HIERARCHY**

Statewide planning for State Park units occurs under a planning hierarchy as illustrated by the diagram on the next page. This hierarchy provides direction for the future of the Park at both the statewide and local level. The highest, or most broad level of planning, is based on the Mission Statement for California State Parks. Each unit of the State Park system is assigned a classification, which is generally based on the physical attributes of the unit, and carries with it specific management guidelines.

Individual park planning starts with the Declaration of Purpose. Once the purpose of the park is established, park-wide goals and guidelines are developed that implement the Department's mission and the park's classification, purpose, and vision. Lastly, management zones (or development prescriptions) and specific area goals and guidelines are developed that focus on unique attributes of sub-areas of the Park. These planning concepts are encapsulated in this General Plan, which provides a framework for planning in Bidwell-Sacramento River State Park.

## **SUBSEQUENT PLANNING ACTIONS**

Major programs and projects that will be implemented during the lifespan of the General Plan will require additional planning. Future planning efforts may include the preparation of specific Resource Management Plans to protect sensitive resources or may involve site-specific facility planning to site and design new park facilities and analyze how they would relate to surrounding land uses.

**Department Mission:** For all units of the California State Park System, *“The Mission of the California Department of Parks and Recreation is to provide for the health, inspiration, and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state’s extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.”*

**Classification:** Along with all units that have been designated as “state parks,” Bidwell-Sacramento River State Park is managed under the direction of Public Resources Code Section 5019.53.

**Declaration of Purpose Vision Statement:** Broad statements of direction, unique to Bidwell-Sacramento River State Park.

**Park-wide Management Goals and Guidelines:** Topical guidance whose scope is relevant for the entire park.

**Management Zones (or Area Concept Planning):** A land-use zoning (or concept) plan for the park that links four general levels of desired resource conditions and visitor experience to geographic areas depicted on a map.

**Specific Area Goals and Guidelines:** Management goals and guidelines that clarify goals for a specific area.

Future planning efforts, such as management plans, or planning associated with subsequent development projects may require preparation of project-specific environmental compliance documents for implementation of management plans. These documents should tier off and be consistent with the program Environmental Impact Report contained in this General Plan. Securing any permits required for future implementation projects would also be part of subsequent planning actions.

Finally, the General Plan may need to be amended if future projects being proposed are not considered in this plan or if other important circumstances change.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Public involvement is an important component of the General Planning process. Input from the public is sought at the beginning and throughout the planning process for a variety of reasons. Most importantly, State Park units are owned by the people of the State of California, and are managed to protect natural and cultural resources and to provide recreation and accommodate use by the people of California. In addition, local residents and stakeholders, as well as specific statewide user groups, may be able to provide important information about the Park's resources, as well as help the Department better manage the Park.

A range of methods, such as public meetings, user surveys, newsletters, and written comments, were used to identify stakeholders of the Park and to identify their needs and concerns for the future management of the Park.

### **1.2.2 DISCLOSURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF THE GENERAL PLAN**

In addition to providing management guidelines for the Park, the purpose of the General Plan is to provide public disclosure of the environmental effects of the plan. The General Plan includes a program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) as defined in the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines §15166. The analysis of broad environmental issues in the environmental analysis component of this plan will be a reference for future environmental analyses for site-specific developments and projects.

## **PURPOSE OF THE PROGRAM EIR**

The purpose of the program EIR is to analyze and disclose the preferred alternative's effect on the environment. It describes significant and potentially significant effects that may result from the implementation of the General Plan, mitigation measures to reduce any significant effects, and level of significance after mitigation. The EIR also includes an overview of significant cumulative environmental effects and mitigation measures, and other contents required by CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines including growth-inducing effects, unavoidable significant effects, irreversible commitment of resources, and a summary.

## **PROGRAM EIR SCOPE**

Because the EIR prepared for the General Plan is programmatic in scope, it does not contain project specific analysis for any of the projects recommended in the General Plan. Separate, more in-depth project-specific environmental compliance documents will be needed for such projects in the future as described above under “Subsequent Planning Actions.”

### **1.3 CONTENTS OF THE GENERAL PLAN**

#### **1.3.1 EXISTING CONDITIONS AND ISSUES**

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, interpretive, and educational values, as well as existing facilities. The existing conditions chapter also lists system-wide and regional planning influences affecting the Park, describes the demographic profile of local resident and representative visitors, and lists issues to be addressed in the General Plan that have been identified during the planning process. Input for the existing conditions chapter has been gathered through a variety of sources including:

- ▶ Review of the unit data file;
- ▶ Review of other applicable technical documents,
- ▶ Review of local and regional applicable planning documents;
- ▶ Database searches;
- ▶ Limited fieldwork;
- ▶ Contact with agencies and other knowledgeable individuals; and
- ▶ User surveys and public meetings.

#### **1.3.2 PARK PLAN**

The “plan” component of the General Plan (Chapter 3) for Bidwell-Sacramento River State Park contains the following features:

- ▶ Unit Purpose and Vision
  - Declaration of Purpose
  - Vision Statement
- ▶ Park-wide Management Goals and Guidelines
  - Natural Resources
  - Visitor Use and Opportunities
  - Administration and Operations
- ▶ Area-Specific Management and Development
  - Area-Specific Concept Plans
  - Site Selection Criteria
- ▶ Park Carrying Capacity

### **1.3.3 PROGRAM ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT**

The program EIR contained in the General Plan (Chapter 4) includes the following components:

- ▶ Introduction to the Environmental Analysis
- ▶ EIR Summary
- ▶ Project Description
- ▶ Environmental Setting
- ▶ Environmental Topics Eliminated from Further Consideration
- ▶ Environmental Impacts
- ▶ Other CEQA Considerations
- ▶ Alternatives to the Proposed Project

### **1.3.4 OTHER GENERAL PLAN CHAPTERS**

In addition, the General Plan contains a list of the organizations and persons consulted during its preparation, the report preparers, a complete list of references, a glossary of terms, as well as technical appendices, figures and tables.

Volume II of the General Plan and EIR will contain all public comments received during the circulation of the draft EIR, responses to public comments, the mitigation monitoring plan, and additional appendices as applicable.

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