

October 17, 2005

All Interested Agencies, Organizations, and Persons

**NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY
BIDWELL-SACRAMENTO RIVER STATE PARK PRELIMINARY GENERAL PLAN
RECIRCULATED DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT**

On December 12, 2003, the California Department of Parks and Recreation (Department) released to the general public and public agencies the Preliminary General Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for Bidwell-Sacramento River State Park (Park). Based on subsequent consideration of the analysis of agricultural resources included in the DEIR, a Recirculated Draft Environmental Impact Report has been prepared by the Department for the Bidwell-Sacramento River State Park General Plan. The Department is the lead agency, pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), responsible for preparation of this document.

Project Location:

The Park is located approximately 6 miles west of the City of Chico in the northern Sacramento Valley. The Park consists of four discontinuous subunits that straddle the Sacramento River between State Route 32 and the mouth of Big Chico Creek. The Irvine Finch River Access area is located on the west side of the river in Glenn County, while the Pine Creek Landing, Indian Fishery, and Big Chico Creek Riparian Area subunits are situated east of the Sacramento River in Butte County.

Project Description:

The proposed project consists of the development of a new General Plan for Bidwell-Sacramento River State Park. The General Plan will guide future management direction at the Park over an approximate 20-year planning horizon. The General Plan contains a comprehensive and integrated set of park-wide goals and guidelines for the long-term management of the Park that focus on protection of environmental resources, enhancements to visitor use and opportunities, and improvements to administration and operations of the Park. In addition, the General 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 subunits and potential property additions that have been considered in the planning process. A range of new recreation facilities are proposed at the Park, which include, but are not limited to, overnight campgrounds, day-use areas, trails, and a visitor center.

Summary of Impacts:

During the public review period on the Draft EIR, a number of comments on the proposed general Plan and environmental analysis were received from public agencies, private groups, and individuals. These comments included the manner in which the DEIR analyzed the effect of the General Plan on agricultural resources. Specifically, one commenter disagreed with the conclusion made in the DEIR that the removal of orchard trees and the subsequent

restoration of riparian vegetation and/or development of low-intensity recreation uses represented a significant and unavoidable environmental impact to agricultural resources, and indicated the opinion that the use of agricultural/conservation easements could mitigate this impact to a less-than-significant level.

After additional consideration of this impact, the Department has determined that the conclusion in the DEIR was based on an incorrect effects analysis. Land use changes, including agricultural land use changes, are not, of themselves, significant adverse impacts on the physical environment. The threshold for significance is whether or not an impact to agricultural resources would then result in a significant environmental effect. Therefore, the correct finding, in this instance, is that the "conversion of designated farmland to non-agricultural uses" in the proposed Bidwell-Sacramento River SP General Plan would result in a less-than-significant significant adverse impact on the physical environment within the meaning of CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines, and thus, no mitigation measures are necessary. The evidence that supports changing the significance conclusion for this impact is based on the planned beneficial change in physical conditions of the affected properties, preservation of the soil and open space resource values attributed to agricultural lands, and the compatibility of the proposed land uses in the General Plan with agriculture and other open space uses on or adjacent to the Park.

Because of the revised conclusion regarding this issue, the Department has elected to recirculate, pursuant to the State CEQA Guidelines §15088.5, those portions of the DEIR addressing whether impacts to agricultural resources result in potentially significant environmental effects. A lead agency is required to recirculate an EIR when significant new information is added to the EIR after public notice is given but before certification; new information is considered "significant" when the EIR is changed in a way that deprives the public of a meaningful opportunity to comment upon a potentially substantial adverse effect of the project (CEQA §15088.5(a)). Although the proposed revisions to DEIR result in a less-than-significant environmental impact conclusion for the subject impact topic, the Department would like to provide the public the opportunity to review the revised analysis of this issue. In addition, because the proposed revisions only affect portions of the DEIR related to agricultural resources, the recirculated DEIR only includes those portions of the document that have been modified or have a bearing the related environmental analysis, in accordance with State CEQA Guidelines §15088.5(c).

Public Comment Period:

A 30-day public review and comment period for the recirculated DEIR has been established, which begins on October 18, 2005 and ends on November 17, 2005. The shortened review has been approved in accordance with Appendix K of the CEQA Guidelines. The Department requests that reviewers limit their comments to the revised sections of the recirculated DEIR, pursuant to CEQA §15088.5(f)(2). The Department will prepare responses to comments previously submitted on the original DEIR, which are included as part of this document, so there is no need to resubmit previous comments on other sections of the DEIR that have not been revised. Responses to new comments received on the revised portions of the recirculated DEIR will also be prepared. After the close of this circulation period, the

Department will prepare a final environmental impact report that will contain comments on the recirculated DEIR and responses to significant environmental points raised in those comments, in addition to the other response to comments presented in this document. Copies of the recirculated DEIR are available for review at the Department's offices in Sacramento (see address below), the Northern Buttes District office (400 Glen Drive, Oroville CA 95966), Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park (525 The Esplanade, Chico CA 95926), and at the Chico Branch of the Butte County Library (1108 Sherman Avenue, Chico CA 95926). Electronic copies of the recirculated DEIR are also posted on the project website (http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=22600) and can be requested by contacting the Department below. Please submit comments in writing to the following address:

California Department of Parks and Recreation
Northern Service Center
One Capital Mall, Suite 410
Sacramento, CA 95814
Contact: Wayne Woodroof