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Earth Day Festivities, Family Fun to be had in Bidwell Park

In honor of the Earth Day, Butte Environmental Council is celebrating in Wildwood Park on Sunday, April 21 from 3 to 7 p.m. This free, family-friendly event will include kite-flying, frisbee-throwing, face-painting and live local music starting at 5 p.m. with Lisa Valentine, 2012 winner of KZFR's Celebration of the Song, followed by Chico favorite The Railflowers. The group picnic areas and barbecues will be available for attendees, and local food trucks will be onsite for those who wish to purchase a meal.

While Earth Day has been an annual celebration for many years in Chico, the location of this year's event is special to BEC and other environmental organizations in Butte County.

"Having the Earth Day Event in Wildwood Park in view of Bidwell Ranch gives us a wonderful opportunity to celebrate in front of some of the land we have helped protect from housing development," said BEC Executive Director Robyn DiFalco.

In 1988, Chico citizens voted to acquire the Bidwell Ranch property, filled with sensitive species, vernal pools and wildflowers, from developers who were proposing to build hundreds of homes next to the entrance to Upper Park. Though the plan was initially approved by City Council, 58% of citizens voted to overturn the decision in a referendum election.

"Bidwell Ranch is a symbol of the community pulling together and really sending a message that we value open space," DiFalco said.

Guided by biologist John Aull and Park Commissioner Mark Herrera, tours of the adjacent property will begin at 3 p.m. at the east end of Wildwood Park, and continue at half-hour intervals until 5 p.m. The guides will explain Bidwell Ranch's rich history and help point out some of the threatened wildlife saved by community action. Since the victory against development in 1988, various groups in Butte County have put forth plans to establish Bidwell Ranch as a mitigation bank, which could offer companies looking to develop land in Butte County the opportunity to offset their negative impacts by investing in the protection of sensitive species on the Bidwell Ranch property.

"Our main goal with this event is to continue the conversation about this mitigation bank process," DiFalco said. "We want to shift the dialogue out of the halls of government and onto to the land in question."

Other groups involved in the 1988 referendum and this year's Earth Day event include Friends of Bidwell Park, the Bidwell Ranch Committee and the Sierra Club, celebrating the birthday of their founder, John Muir. A ceremonial cake-cutting will precede the concert at 5 p.m.

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