

CHICO DISC GOLF CLUB

Supporting Disc Golf in Chico

Known Issues Related to Disc Golf In Upper Bidwell Park and Possible Solutions

Purpose: The purpose of this document is to identify known issues regarding the disc golf courses in upper Bidwell Park, and to bring forward potential solutions to these issues. This is not a proposal for these actions to be taken at this time, but a framework that might guide actions taken, based on results from the Master Management Plan update process. This document was compiled from the opinions and experiences of the people that use this portion of the park most frequently, disc golfers. There are really two primary categories that need to be addressed in this document.

Category 1 - Population: The first is the changing demographics of the disc golf community in Chico, and the effect that it has on the local disc golf courses. Local retailers now stock large selections of disc golf products, and the number of courses within a 4-hour drive from Chico has increased to around 20. This availability of equipment, and close proximity to courses supported by municipalities, has contributed to the growth of the disc golf community in Chico. Additionally, the sport is growing nationally with ~1300 courses, and 7-10 million people having played disc golf.

How does this relate to the Upper Bidwell Park Courses (hereafter referred to as short course and long course)? As the sport grows and the community becomes more aware of it, the number of people using the disc golf courses has increased. This issue of population is primarily a concern on the short course. Here's why.

Long Course:

The course is more difficult; therefore fewer players play it regularly
The players on the long course are avid enthusiasts and more aware of etiquette
The long course is spread out over a larger area (more room less people)
A club exists that has maintained the long course for some time

Short Course:

Due to the growth of the sport, there are more beginners playing at this time
Not all players aware of etiquette (such as moving/snapping the smallest tree limb is strictly prohibited)
The course is compact, (less room more people)
Many disc golf enthusiasts, who are more responsible stewards of the land, will not play the short course due to the crowds

I learned to play disc golf on the short course and spent about a year playing there before I ventured down to the long course. But until recently, myself, and our club had very little to do with the short course. In addition to being too easy, most avid disc golfers did not like the crowds, litter, and lack of etiquette present on the short course, and so avoided it like the plague. It dawned on me while crossing the short course some months back that it had degraded to the point that it might become unplayable. This would have a profound effect on the long course, and our club decided to get re-engaged in the short course and to try to improve the situation. We have been successful in reducing litter on the short course, and this document is another step in our attempt to improve the facilities currently available to disc golfers in Chico.

CHICO DISC GOLF CLUB

Supporting Disc Golf in Chico

Mitigation of Population Effects: There are a variety of steps the city could take to reduce the effects of the disc golf population in upper Bidwell Park. The Chico Disc Golf Club supports improving the existing courses, making minor course layout changes, and keeping two 18 hole courses at the current location. However, in keeping with our commitment to maintain an open dialogue we have presented 5 scenarios that will likely be discussed during the Master Management Plan update, and our opinions regarding them.

- 1. Removal of All Disc Golf Facilities:** You really don't want to do this. In addition to depriving hundreds of Chicoans of a healthy, fun, activity you would be impacting existing businesses. And while reducing the population of park users to some degree, avid disc golfers would simply replace the tone-poles after a period of time, and/or play the course as an "object" course. An object course typically uses trees as the target in lieu of some dedicated target like a tone pole or basket. Even with heavy law enforcement it would only be a period of time before the courses were placed back in use. Beyond that, the bad press, potential class-action lawsuits, general political headache (you would have to outlaw Frisbees in the park), and basic unfairness of this option make it highly undesirable.
- 2. Removal of the Short Course:** This would effectively shift the population on the short course down to the long course facilities. Where you don't currently have an overpopulation problem, you would soon develop one. Chico has a large population of disc golfers, and would probably be in a similar situation to the Orangevale Course (Sacramento). In Orangevale (whose course is similar in size to the long course) the entire course is full by 7AM on a Saturday. By 7AM you have 20-40 people playing disc golf, and by 1PM you have between 70-100 people. Some disc golfers have advocated additional disc golf facilities located in lower park, or some other city location. This is a reasonable solution, but it is not advisable to remove the short course until a replacement course has been proposed, accepted, designed, and **built**. We would oppose this as vocally as possible. Due to historic renegeing by the city on improvements to the existing disc golf locations, only an approved, funded, and **built** replacement facility is an acceptable alternative to the existing short course.
- 3. Reduction in the number of holes on the Short Course:** A major issue that the short course faces is the compact nature of the course layout. By spreading the targets out and allowing more room between targets and tees you could reduce damage to trees, plot a more environmentally sound course, and allow for some of the infrastructure improvements discussed later in this document. The course could be designed to bypass areas that need restoration from current overuse. This option would not reduce the population of park users, and might shift some of the short course users to the long course. But this would not be a mass migration from one park locale to another. If 9 holes were planned beginner players would likely play the short course twice to form an 18 hole course.

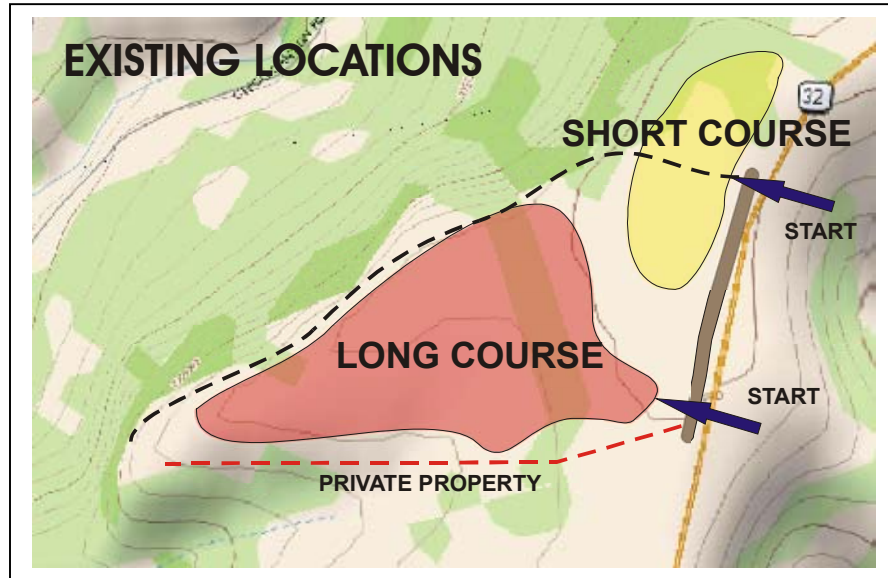
www.chicodiscgolf.org

chicodiscgolf@solutionscubed.com

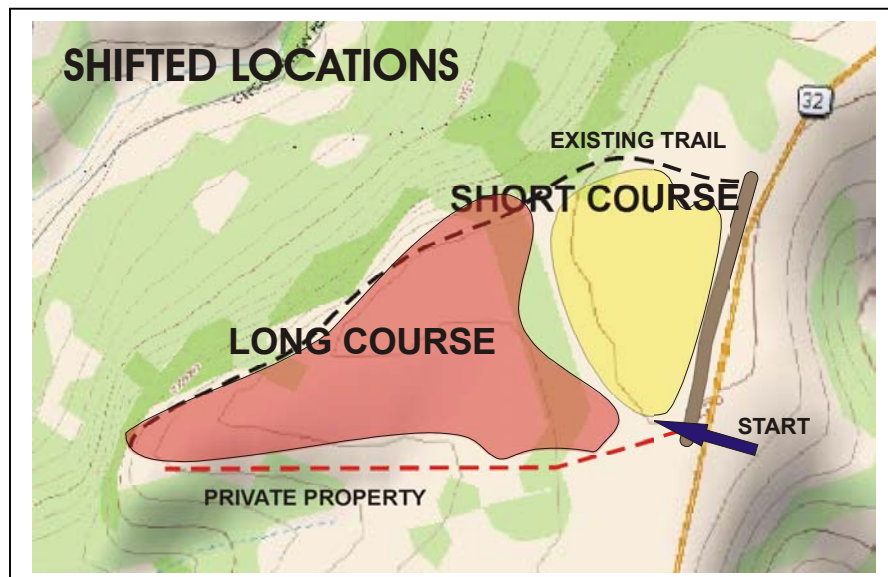
CHICO DISC GOLF CLUB

Supporting Disc Golf in Chico

- 4. Spreading and/or shifting the Short Course:** Currently the short course and long course are entered on two separate paths from the dirt causeway off of highway 32. This provides ample parking for users of both courses and provides a buffer of unused land between the two courses. The short course is suffering from degradation because of a growing population, vandalism (not specifically by disc golfers, but who knows?), and a lack of active participation by the city.



One way to mitigate environmental damage would be to shift the short course south and west. This would allow the course to spread (a hole reduction could also occur with this shift.) and course layout could change to allow some over-used sections of the short course to be placed out-of-use. The entrance to the both course would be moved to a single point where bathrooms and an information kiosk could be located. Signage regarding park rules would be located at this single entrance point as well. In order to shift the short course the long course would have to also shift west, and would use some portion of unused land that lies between the current course and the southern abutting private property line. Holes 1, 17, and 18 of the long course would have to be moved and alternatives would have to be found. This area would then be used by the short course.



CHICO DISC GOLF CLUB

Supporting Disc Golf in Chico

An existing mountain bike and hiking trail that currently cuts across the short course could now be dedicated to bikers and hikers, and the parking area currently used by short course players would be empty for other park users. An area of the cliff that runs along hole 12 of the short course, and is frequented by sightseers, would no longer have disc golf played in its vicinity. Short course users would still have the opportunity to walk to hole 2 of the long course to take in the view (as do hikers and mountain bikers), and hole 2 would remain a part of the long course.

A significant downside to shifting the courses is the amount of work necessary to realign the courses and ensure good flow of play. But we feel that it is important to keep this option on the table during the Master Management Plan update process.

- 5. Keeping the Short Course and Long Course as is:** Both of these courses are actually very well laid out. The short course suffers from the maladies mentioned previously. But it is fun to play, excellent for beginners, and an asset to both the sport of disc golf and Chico's community. The Long course has excellent flow of play and could be a premier disc golf course in California with the right support. We believe that much of the damage caused by overuse is a direct result of 2 issues.

- 1. Inaction by the city:** The Parks Department and City of Chico failed to follow through on improvements planned and improved through a previous process. This backtracking occurred at a time when the sport was becoming well known as a Chico past time, and was growing as a national sport. The lack of improvements in infrastructure, caused by a threatened lawsuit, can be held directly responsible for much of the environmental damage the course has sustained in recent history. Furthermore, a lack of signage and an information kiosk at this location, which likely would have been included in the improvements, makes dissemination of information to disc golfers difficult. The city has discussed educating park users during meetings to change a variety of behaviors, but has actively prevented the education of disc golfers as to good stewardship of the course areas.

- 2. A lack of oversight and authority:** There is no city-authorized body that oversees disc golf in the park. Targets can't be moved and fixed in place to prevent damage to specific trees, therefore any targets moved for this reason will be moved back to their original locations by the next player through. Changing tee locations, for soil erosion reasons, cannot be done because we've been asked not to make any changes or additions to the park. And additionally, the tee locations are just dirt patches with some rocks piled up in front of them. Players will always throw from the most level, and dry, dirt patch that they can find, so tees expand with each rainy season. Most short course players don't even seem to be aware that the courses are not city supported, and wonder why the course does not have baskets, cement tees, and trash receptacles like most other courses in the state. They just assume that litter will be picked up and vandalism and damage will be repaired. The city appears to feel that educating park users on proper use of the land is a high priority everywhere except the disc golf courses. In these areas education, mitigation of environmental damage, and dissemination of information are actively obstructed. As a disc golfer you have to wonder why.

www.chicodiscgolf.org

chicodiscgolf@solutionscubed.com

CHICO DISC GOLF CLUB

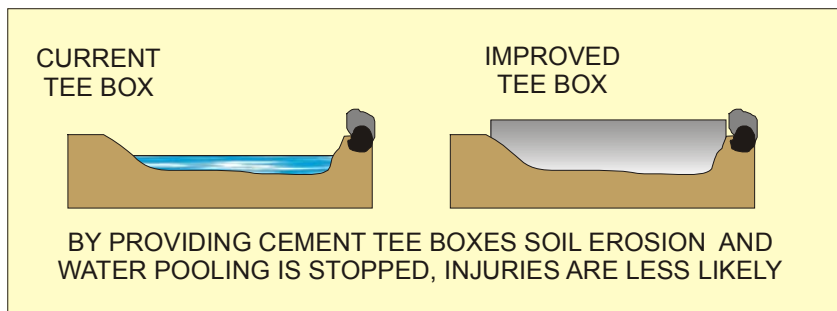
Supporting Disc Golf in Chico

Category 2 - Infrastructure: This category covers course layout and various techniques that may be used to reduce and mitigate the effect that disc golf can have on the environment. We would like to be on record that we support course modifications where environmental damage can be reduced. We believe that a properly designed and maintained course can be actively used with no more damage to the environment than other park activities (mountain bike trails, equestrian trails, and swimming holes).

1. Tee Boxes: The tee box is the area that a disc golfer drives his disc from. The disc is thrown hardest from this point. Existing tee boxes are located where the ground is relatively flat, 200'-400' from the target. Rocks or dead logs are often placed at the front of the tee box to mark the front edge of the throwing area. The tee boxes are the most heavily used part of the course. For this reason the dirt tees become "dug out" from the throwing motion (planting a foot before releasing the disc). Many tee boxes fill with water in the winter, causing disc golfers to throw from outside of the summer tee. This causes an increased area to be used, and the tee boxes often become treacherous due to erosion or the lava rocks that permeate course.

Disc golf etiquette requires that disc golfers use a primary path forward from the tee box (towards the target) and move off the path at a right angle when perpendicular to their disc's lie. This etiquette is not commonly known (nor defined by signage) in the upper park courses. Partly because of this, and also because of the changing size and moving front edge of the unimproved tee boxes, you will often find multiple paths exiting a tee box towards the target.

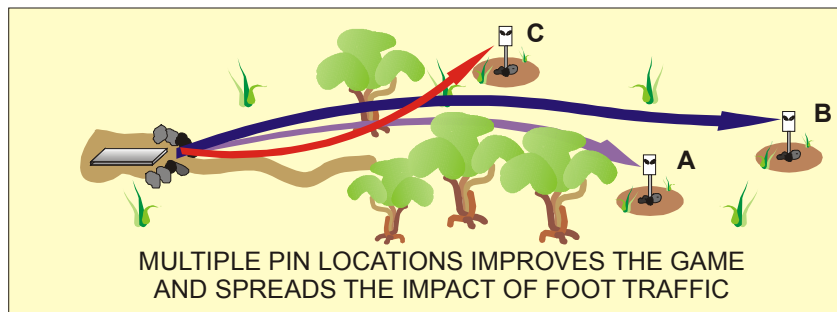
Most disc golf courses make use of cement tee pads. These pads provide a level surface for the player to throw from, eliminate pooling of water, soil erosion caused by the throwing motion, and expansion of the tee box due to seasonal changes in the tee box and players cheating forward. An additional benefit of the cement tee is that players are less likely to injure themselves when throwing from a stable cement pad. Forming "channeling" borders to the front of a tee box, combined with trail restoration techniques, and multiple target locations can reduce the number of heavily used trails on the disc golf courses.



CHICO DISC GOLF CLUB

Supporting Disc Golf in Chico

2. **Hole Layout:** Damage to trees, multiple trails, and soil erosion can be reduced through course layout options. It is useful to point out that some of these same options also improve the disc golf experience for the player. By having two or three fixed target locations for each hole the course can be modified on a regular basis to give certain areas a break from foot traffic. Typically the controlling authority of the course will “plant” cement bases in the ground that lock to collars on the target’s base. Only the controlling authority has the key to move the disc golf targets. A schedule may be set up so that each target location is used only once every three spring seasons (assuming three optional locations). This means that trees and grasses will have 2 spring seasons of growth for every season of heavy foot traffic. At other times of the year the targets may be moved more often. It is also customary to make use of optional locations during tournaments.



Trees and other obstacles are a large part of the game of disc golf. Much of the fun of the sport is figuring out how to avoid throwing into trees. Any disc that stops 2 meters above the ground is “out-of-bounds” (OB, adds a penalty stroke to your score). So players actively try to find the clearest route to the target. But each hole must be balanced to include both a challenge and an opportunity. A hole surrounded by oak trees is no more enjoyable than a completely open shot with no obstacles whatsoever. Since the discs leave the tee with their greatest speed and force, placing trees directly in front of the tee is not a good layout option. Having trees 75-100 feet to the front of the tee is a reasonable compromise.

Many holes on both the long and short course match this format. Others may be in need of some adjustment. But it is not impossible to evaluate the area as a whole and propose modified layout to the courses. If this is coupled with multiple target locations for each hole, then trees that are stressed can be given a break for an extended period of time and even a couple of growing seasons.

It is important to keep in perspective the level of tree damage a disc will inflict. A single fire in upper park (which we seem to have annually between Bear Hole and Horseshoe Lake) will destroy more trees and cause more winter soil erosion than the disc golf courses have caused in their existence. If the city is truly concerned about this issue then it should prevent human traffic from using areas that regularly are subject to fires. The argument that tree damage from disc strikes, or even from foot traffic, is so extensive as to cause irreparable harm to the environment does not have a basis in fact. If it did then there would be no reason to move the courses, as the damage is already done. For every dead tree on the disc golf course, I can find you another dead tree in any similarly sized area of the park that has never seen a disc. For every photo of tree damage from disc strikes, I can show you a tree in close proximity with less or no visible damage. The problem of discs striking trees can be reduced through good course layout and optional target locations. Until the city allows an effort to go forward to mitigate tree damage it is premature to assume that these efforts will not be fruitful.

Below are two examples of holes on the long course that seem to match a desired format, where disc strikes are at low velocity, and the trees still present challenging obstacles to disc golfers.

CHICO DISC GOLF CLUB

Supporting Disc Golf in Chico

Shot Diagram - Hole 5 (Long Course) ~302 feet

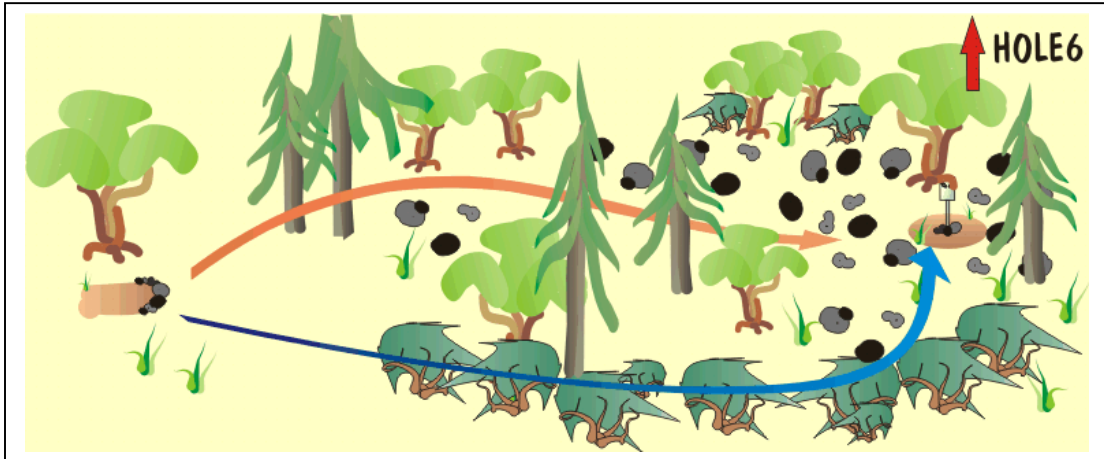


Photo - Hole 5 (Long Course)



On hole 5 disc golfers throw a "turnover" or "anhyzer" (orange arrow above) to the left of the pine tree at the right of the photo. Other players throw a "hyzer" (blue above) to the right of the pine tree over the "whitethorn" that lines the right side of the fairway. Errant throws that hit trees are usually due to the disc slipping out of the hand early or being released late. Damage to trees is minimal because of the angle of the throw and the distance to the first set of trees.

CHICO DISC GOLF CLUB

Supporting Disc Golf in Chico

Shot Diagram - Hole 16 (Long Course) ~265 feet

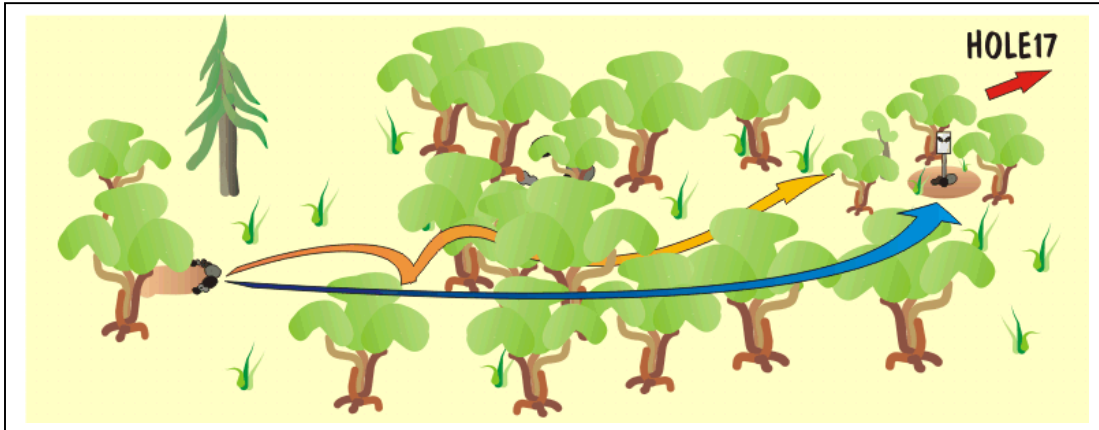
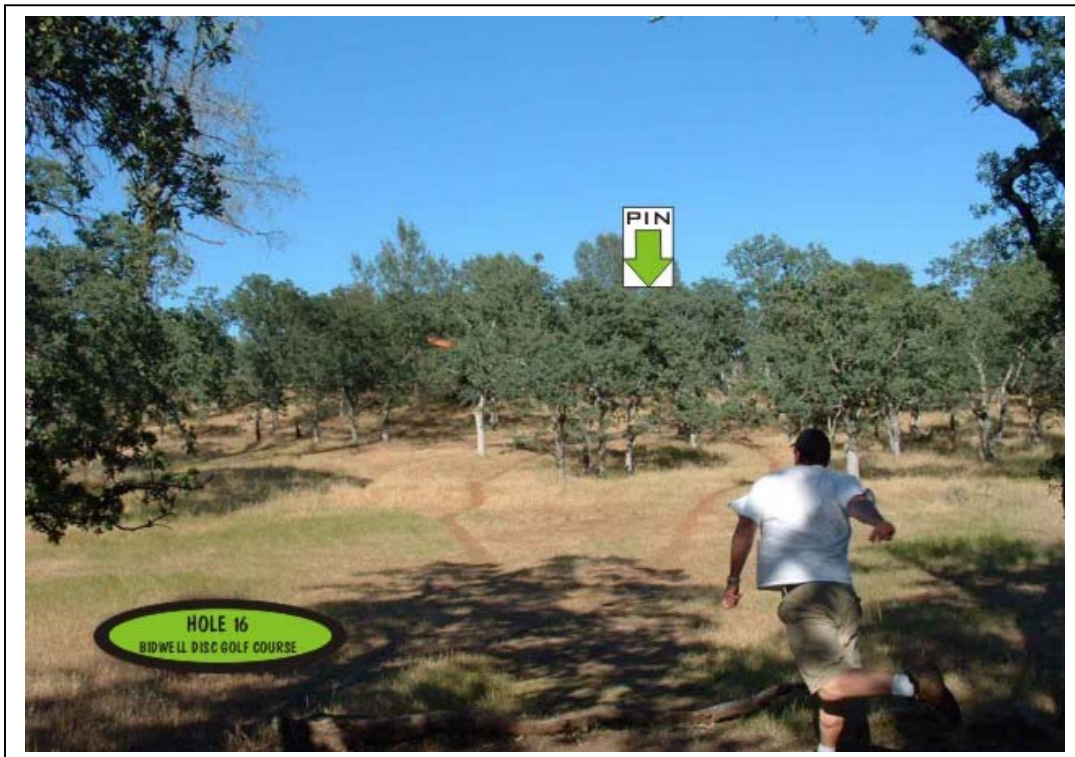


Photo - Hole 16 (Long Course)



Hole 16 is an example of a hole where your disc will typically come into contact with an oak tree. However there is no shot going straight at the trees, so few players attempt a “line drive”. Most players try to clear the top of the trees and slide their disc in from the left or right side of the fairway. Discs often run out of steam and fall down through the foliage, but a hard strike on a tree at this hole is uncommon. A few players attempt a “roller” here (orange arrow above). Rollers are common throws on courses with manicured lawns, but hole 16 is the only hole in upper Bidwell Park where they are regularly attempted.

CHICO DISC GOLF CLUB

Supporting Disc Golf in Chico

- 3. Rest Areas:** There are a couple of reasons to include rest areas on the disc golf courses. First, it's hot in the summer. People and pets need a place to cool off in the shade. Unlike other areas of upper park, the creek and the coolness it provides, is not a short hike away. The second reason is that it helps to localize litter. This is an issue specifically for the short course where users tend to be less aware of their responsibilities. A single rest area on the short course with a trash can, and a single trash can (already in place) at the beginning of the short course would be helpful. At this point in time the long course is self-policing regarding litter, but a couple of official rest areas (a single picnic bench in the shade) would be desired. Rest areas would also be a good place to reiterate park rules regarding trail use and litter.

Summary: There are issues that need to be dealt with regarding the disc golf courses in upper Bidwell Park. These issues are caused by an increase in the population of park users, a lack of positive involvement by the city, and few park users that are unaware of their responsibilities. The city advocates education of park users regarding dog feces in upper park and is unopposed to new signage in upper park for that purpose. In comparison signage attempting to inform disc golfers of proper trail use is unwanted. Tree damage and soil erosion caused by equestrian use, mountain biking, hiking, running, and even wild fires are deemed acceptable by the city (and with good reason), but these same issues will be cited by opponents of disc golf as reason enough to ban the sport from upper Bidwell Park. If disc strikes killed oak trees then the short course in upper park would be deforested. Some trees may be damaged, and we are willing to work with the city and environmental groups to protect those trees. But if six years of disc strikes have not killed these trees, then we would expect a couple of years of reprieve from disc strikes could repair most of the damage (see course layout discussion). Trail restoration occurs in upper park on a regular basis, and is a part of the Parks Department's volunteer efforts. But no trail restoration or definition of playing areas on the disc golf courses in upper park is allowed.

If all of the inaction on the part of the city is due to a threatened lawsuit regarding the Master Management Plan and disc golf, then this is unfortunate. With a staff of city lawyers it is unlikely that any lawsuit could have progressed faster than the Master Management Plan update process. Furthermore, trail restoration, signage, and litter issues are clearly within the realm of the city's responsibility for all areas of Bidwell Park. The city could have begun improvements to this area that were not disc golf related, including improving the parking area, and held disc golf related improvements (and the money allotted for them) until the Master Management Plan update process was complete. Taking the path of least resistance (avoiding a lawsuit) was not good leadership; a compromise should have been sought at the time the lawsuit was threatened. It is notable that other improvements to Bidwell Park have been made since the disc golf course plans were shelved. Two examples are the handicapped accessible fishing pier and the observatory. Neither of these improvements was stopped, even though they should have been subject to the same Master Management Plan limitations as the disc golf course.

That being said, we are where we are. The disc golf courses are regularly used. Environmental issues may be real, but if so, can be mitigated with proper restructuring of the disc golf courses. The Chico Disc Golf Club, while not representing all disc golfers, is actively seeking to discuss all options with the city and other interested organizations. We have taken an active role policing litter in the upper park area, and are willing to contribute more to volunteer efforts that improve these areas for future Chicoans.

It is our hope that the city is finally willing to make concrete, facts-on-the-ground, contributions to finding a permanent place for disc golf in the Chico community. We look forward to that commitment.