

# **PUBLIC OUTREACH AND PARTICIPATION IN THE NATURAL SCIENCES THROUGH COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS OF THE NORTHERN CALIFORNIA NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM AND CSU CHICO**

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California State University at Chico and the Northern California Natural History Museum are collaborating to build a museum and discovery center on the grounds of CSU Chico. Construction is due to begin in 2006 but in anticipation of the edifice, programs have been implemented for the last 3 years to begin fulfilling the educational mission of the project. Since Fall, 2003 “The Museum Without Walls” (MWOW) public lecture series has highlighted scientific research conducted by CSU Chico faculty and others. Lecture topics have ranged from the geologic history of northern California to plant and animal diversity, to the aging process. More recent lecture series have been topical, including a series of 6 lectures on water issues of northern California. The spring 2005 MWOW lecture series has drawn ~ 200 people (including ~ 50 Jr/Sr High school students) for each of the lectures given by science faculty. The burgeoning museum has also sponsored summer Family Days in which families participate in hands-on natural science activities at the Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve. Activities include track walks to observe and discuss the animal population in the reserve, identification of rocks and fossils found in the reserve, and botanical walks. Participants also consider the vitality of Big Chico Creek, which flows from the reserve through downtown Chico. Family days have drawn ~ 50 participants each, and remain a favorite public program. The level of enthusiasm and feedback from participants indicates a strong desire from the public to learn and participate in science-based activities, particularly those that are relevant to northern California. The 2001 report by the McConnell Foundation cited a need for science-based opportunities in northern California, to help prepare the public for regional job opportunities in science, which are expected to far outnumber potential employees. The Northern California Natural History Museum at CSU Chico has fit a niche identified by the McConnell report and the public has responded with great excitement. The collaboration will result in exhibits and activities developed by CSU Chico faculty and museum staff to deepen the citizen-scientist experience now, and far into the future.