

2023 Annual Report



Chico State

**BIG CHICO CREEK
ECOLOGICAL
RESERVE**





“ We enjoyed learning more about the great work underway at the Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve. Given the year-round wildfire realities that we continue to address in California, seeing the results of successful restoration and resilience projects at the Ecological Reserve were a testament to what can be accomplished when we work together to create a more wildfire-resilient California. As we continue this important work throughout the state, these projects reflect the stewardship and ecological values so important to meeting our goals. We look forward to continued partnership with Chico State and the Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve.”

—**Joe Tyler**

Director/Fire Chief, Cal Fire



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Reflection and Opportunity

Okay, I am taking up more space for my portion of the annual report this year. But I need it! This past year has been the highlight of my career. We have accomplished things that I will not only be proud of when the time comes to reflect upon my work life, but upon my life as a whole. Our accomplishments center around the responsible stewardship of our natural lands through historical tribal partnerships, a huge leap in research and workforce development, along with critical wildlife habitat and connectivity projects.

This past year, we became the first institution of higher education in the State of California to return land back to a Native American Tribe. In September, we transferred ownership and management of the 93-acre Butte Creek Ecological Preserve from Chico State Enterprises to the Mechoopda Indian Tribe of Chico Rancheria. Do you know which institution of higher education accomplished the second transfer of land back to an Indian Tribe in California? Chico State. Late this year, we transferred the Eagle Lake Field Station to the Susanville Indian Rancheria. This transfer took nearly five years and required a literal act of congress. While both of these projects have likely taken years off my life and definitely hairs off my head, I am grateful for the part I was able to play in these historic transfers.

This year we not only supported tribes at the state and federal level, but we served 152 local Tribal youth through our Momi Nak Sa program. Funded by California State Parks, this outdoor education grant has allowed Tribal youth to participate in outdoor stewardship activities including a week long Tribal Youth Summer Camp at the Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve.

California State Parks is not the only state agency recognizing and investing in our program and projects. This past year saw unprecedented support from CAL FIRE, who has invested in our prescribed fire workforce development program and is contracting with us to research the effects of prescribed fire on in the Sierra Nevada and Cascade foothill ecosystems. This along with federal funding through the Good Jobs Challenge has allowed us to greatly increase our pace and scale of good fire throughout the region.

Our students are leaving us and impacting the world! 21 graduates in the past year are out stewarding lands beyond our borders to make this world a better place for wildlife and humans alike.

NONE OF THIS IS POSSIBLE WITHOUT YOU. Seriously. Community support provides the seeds for all of our accomplishments. Every program we have has started because of a generous donor supporting our vision. You allow us to be innovative and try things that no one else is doing. Now others are taking notice and wanting to invest in the programs you allowed us to start. THANK YOU.

Come join me at our Candles in the Canyon event in May of 2024!
More info to follow.

See you at the Reserve,



Eli Goodsell,
Executive Director, Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve



BCCER AT A GLANCE



39

Wildland Management
Program students since 2020



2,598

ecotherapy participants



170

acres burned



\$60k+

community support received



125

rainbow trout surveyed
per mile of Big Chico Creek



21

staff attained impactful jobs
post-BCCER



WILDLAND MANAGEMENT PROGRAM STRIVES TO PROTECT THE WILDLANDS OF THE WEST

The Master of Science in Interdisciplinary Studies: Wildland Management program is one of the newest, and fastest growing master's programs at Chico State. The program was developed by the BCCER in collaboration with the Office of Graduate Studies and faculty of numerous departments across campus, with the goal to develop college educated land management professionals with experience and certifications.

Since its beginnings in fall 2020, the program has accepted 39 students, 12 of which make up the 2023 cohort. These students bring in diverse undergrad and professional backgrounds, making for a richer program that the students can grow from.

Students of the program have a wide range of focuses, using their personal intersection with nature to develop practical projects and resourceful theses. From developing K-12 curriculum around wildfire or Native American education, identifying the mammalian predators and their response to habitat restoration, examining human impacts on wildlife through a feasibility survey of a highway animal corridor, to studying bird diversity after catastrophic wildfire, these students' projects aid in bettering the natural world for all.



BUTTE CREEK ECOLOGICAL PRESERVE OWNERSHIP CHANGED HANDS IN A HISTORIC LAND TRANSFER



On September 23, 2022, the Mechoopda Indian Tribe of Chico Rancheria and Chico State Enterprises (CSE) completed a landmark agreement that returned the 93 acres of land known as the Butte Creek Ecological Preserve (BCEP) back to the Mechoopda Indian Tribe of Chico Rancheria. Enabled by recently passed legislation (Assembly Bill 379) sponsored by James Gallagher (R-Yuba City), the agreement is the first of its kind in California.

Chico State and Tribal leaders were joined by local conservation nonprofit leaders and representatives of Butte Creek canyon community groups to celebrate the historic transfer.

“Today, I’m honored the State of California returned a parcel of culturally and ecologically important land back to its rightful caretakers,” said Gallagher. “The Mechoopda Indian Tribe is the most qualified steward of the Butte Creek Ecological Preserve to manage the land and its wildlife and plants as it recovers from the 2018 Camp Fire.”

Under the terms of the zero-dollar, land-transfer agreement that was approved by the California Wildlife Conservation Board, no buildings or structures can be built on the property and it will continue to be utilized for conservation and educational purposes.

Through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between CSE and the Mechoopda, Chico State faculty and staff will have the ability to access the property to conduct research, and field trips for K–12 students throughout the North State will continue.

“Words cannot begin to describe the importance of Butte Creek and Butte Creek Canyon to our people,” said Dennis Ramirez, chairman of the Mechoopda Tribe. “It is with great honor that we become stewards of these sacred Indigenous lands once again. We look forward to getting to work and accelerating the property’s recovery process so that it can once again host visitors and educational field trips.”

BCEP is a 93-acre site along the middle section of Butte Creek. The property contains more than a mile of creek frontage, as well as habitat for many species of special status, including the western pond turtle and yellow-legged frog. Butte Creek is critical salmon habitat and spawning grounds for the largest population of Central Valley spring run Chinook, a state and federally threatened evolutionarily significant unit.

“The University has owned the property since 1998 and for the last several decades has hosted thousands of K–12 students on educational field trips,” said now-retired Chico State President Gayle Hutchinson, who also served as the presidential liaison for the California State University Native American Initiative. “It has served as a hands-on learning site for Chico State students in numerous disciplines and provided grounds for critical research on water quality, wildlife, fire prevention, and other areas of interest. We are pleased that these activities will continue as we proudly partner with the Mechoopda on this important land transfer agreement. The preserve has been closed since the Camp Fire, and we look forward to it becoming accessible once again for students, faculty, and communities.”



EAGLE LAKE FIELD STATION OWNERSHIP TRANSFERRED

For the second time within a year, the return of ancestral land to Native American Tribes was completed. On November 13, 2023, Chico State Enterprises returned the land known as the Eagle Lake Field Station to the Susanville Indian Rancheria, the federally recognized tribe of Lassen County.

The transfer of the property was made possible by the Recreation and Public Purposes Tribal Parity Act, introduced by Senators Dianne Feinstein and Alex Padilla (both D-Calif.), along with Congressman Doug LaMalfa (R-Calif.) and signed into law in January 2023 this year by President Joe Biden. It allows the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to approve the sale and leasing of land to Tribal governments for significantly below market value, as long it is used for recreational and other public purposes. Concurrently, the Susanville Indian Rancheria, Chico State Enterprises, and Chico State Office of Tribal Relations worked tirelessly with BLM to initiate the Department of the Interior's transfer of the Eagle Lake Field Station from Chico State to the Rancheria.

"I am happy that my bipartisan bill, The Recreation and Public Purposes Act, could be put to good use by Susanville Rancheria," said Congressman LaMalfa. "For nearly a century, local governments have been using this bill to improve recreation and public facilities. Now tribes can also use the same authority to make better use of surplus lands. By returning management to the Susanville Rancheria, this land will be better used and protected than it has been."

"The Eagle Lake Field Station is in the best possible hands with the Susanville Indian Rancheria. We look forward to seeing how they honor this special place."

— Terence Lau, Interim Chico State Provost

The remote, 80-acre field station is on the eastern shore of Eagle Lake in Lassen County. Eagle Lake itself is the second largest freshwater lake entirely within the boundaries of California. The station is located within a sage and juniper woodland with a variety of habitats (marshes, lakes, streams, montane coniferous forests and high desert) very close by. The Tribe has a deep cultural, historical and geographical connection to this land and is planning to use this site for cultural, educational, and recreational purposes.

"These Tribes have stewarded and been present on the land around Eagle Lake since time immemorial," said Arian Hart, tribal chairman of the Rancheria. "Through this transfer, we can now care for and deepen our reciprocal relationship with our ancestral lands while sharing this special place with the community."

Chico State's presence at Eagle Lake dates back more than 70 years. The University purchased the property from the U.S. Bureau of Land Management in 1960, and the station opened in 1964. The 80-acre parcel has 15 structures and is adjacent to thousands of acres of federal land that have provided immersive learning experiences and served as grounds for research for College of Natural Sciences students and faculty conducting field work.

"It is truly an honor to play a part in righting historical wrongs and returning land to its historical inhabitants," said Interim Chico State Provost Terence Lau. "The Eagle Lake Field Station is in the best possible hands with the Susanville Indian Rancheria. We look forward to seeing how they honor this special place."



Eagle Lake Field Station
Chico State Meriam Library, Special Collections



Jade Elhardt Photography



Jade Elhardt Photography

IRON CANYON FISH PASSAGE PROJECT

The BCCER and our partners were awarded funding by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for our collaborative project to restore access to native habitat in the upper reaches of Big Chico Creek. This project will remove a fish passage barrier in Iron Canyon, which sits upstream from Salmon Hole, and ultimately restore access to more than eight miles of native fish habitat and critically needed spawning and rearing habitat for steelhead and spring-run Chinook salmon in upper Big Chico Creek, including cold water habitat critical for climate resilience.

Because these ocean-going migratory fish are a keystone species, the entire ecosystem of upper Bidwell Park will be revitalized as fish populations rebound, ultimately benefiting raptors, bears, and other natural fish predators and bringing nutrients up from the ocean to enrich the soil and native plants. This project represents a long-term commitment to ensure the biodiversity and health of Big Chico Creek for decades to come.

The first phase of the Iron Canyon Fish Passage Project began in summer 2023, with one of our partners working on project design and conducting

hydrological and topographic surveys, and another partner working on permitting and planning tasks. We have taken the lead on the community engagement aspect; tabling at various events and farmers markets to educate the public on the upcoming project in Upper Bidwell Park. The on-the-ground work, which could begin as early as 2024, will entail removing an 65-year-old, non-functioning fishway that currently completely blocks fish passage in all but the highest water years. Additionally, a section of the stream channel will be reconfigured to mimic a natural channel form that will be passable by salmon and steelhead even at low stream flows and will require no future maintenance.

“I’m excited to be a part of this team, taking an ecosystem-based approach to restore the native fish populations in Big Chico Creek,” said Damon Goodman, California Trout’s Shasta-Klamath regional director. “NOAA has identified this project as a top priority to recover spring-run Chinook salmon in the Central Valley. We will be working with our partners to make sure the project also benefits the entire watershed and all its inhabitants, including the people of Chico who are devoted to Bidwell Park.”



A few of the 70-year-old concrete fish ladder weir that are no longer functional.



Drone shot of Iron Canyon



Salmon photo courtesy of FISHBIO

CAL FIRE RX FIRE RESEARCH AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

On a beautiful day in March, Chief Joe Tyler and other top brass of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CAL FIRE) visited the Chico State campus and the Big Chico Creek Ecological Reserve for an all-day tour. This visit was correlated with the awarding of both a CAL FIRE Rx fire research contract and a CAL FIRE workforce development grant, amounting to over \$2.5 million invested in BCCER.

The CAL FIRE group met with outgoing President Gayle Hutchinson, incoming President Steve Perez, representatives of the Mechoopda Indian Tribe of Chico Rancheria, and others in Kendall Hall while on campus. Afterward, the group transitioned to the BCCER, where they embarked on a guided tour led by Eli Goodsell. Presentations about the BCCER's fire ecology and land stewardship were conducted by Professor Don Hankins and Fire and Flora Coordinator Mitch Bamford. Partner collaboration—a big part of what we do—was also highlighted.

One program highlighted during the visit was the Higher Education Prescribed Fire Training (HEFT Rx) program. The program, in collaboration with Feather River Community College, will result in a trained, professional, and accessible workforce for private and public land managers pursuing prescribed fire projects throughout Northern California. The HEFT Rx program will provide over 200 federally recognized certifications through National Wildfire Coordinating Group to over 60 participants over the next three years. For a minimal investment of \$20,177 per participant, these 60 practitioners will provide an immediate impact on prescribed fire project capacity across California.



INFLUENTIAL STEWARDSHIP

BCCER's stewardship practices have been influential throughout the community. From a Wildland Management Program student developing a guide for land management based on BCCER practices to the collaboration with a new program on the Chico State campus known as College Corps to our continued partnership with organizations such as the California Conservation Corps' Forestry Corps, the BCCER has been expanding its influence on the land and its people.



College Corps

This new program provides Chico State students opportunities to support and learn from organizations and programs on and off campus working in three priority areas: K-12 education, climate action, and food insecurity. These students commit to a yearlong fellowship to complete their required 450 hours of service with an external community partner. The BCCER has been that community partner for a few fellows, assisting with work in Bidwell Park. These fellows have also begun to participate in our new volunteer program that was launched in spring 2023, as they look to gain even more experience.

Shrub Club Volunteer Program

The Shrub Club was officially started in spring 2023, with the goal to provide all students with the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in ecological restoration. The program works with busy student schedules to get the students out into the field to work and learn.

California Conservation Corps' Forestry Corps

The Forestry Corps continues to work and learn at the BCCER. Under the direction of our project manager, the Forestry Corps is led daily by Facilities and Operations Coordinator Brian Pope and long-time volunteer Paul Maslin. These corps members continue to gain a variety of skills and learn about the ecosystem that they're working in.



#CaliforniansForAll
CollegeCorps

MOMI NAK SA OUTDOOR PROGRAM



The BCCER was awarded funding from California's Department of Parks and Recreation's Office of Grants and Local Services through its Outdoor Equity Grants Program. This \$700,000 project, the BCCER's Momi Nak Sa Outdoor Program, is a collaboration with Chico State's Office of Tribal Relations, the Mechoopda Indian Tribe, and Four Winds of Indian Education.

This funding increases access for Tribal youth and the Tribal community to outdoor education and meaningful cultural experiences. The Momi Nak Sa Outdoor Program goes a step beyond typical outdoor recreational activities to integrate

traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), cultural education, and land stewardship largely within Mechoopda traditional territory. Natural area trips and activities are designed to be sequenced into different "tracks" to achieve specific education and career readiness goals. Together, the four partners work together to improve educational attainment and increase access to natural resource careers for Native youth within the local community.

This program is funded by the Outdoor Equity Grants Program, created through AB 209 and administered by California State Parks, Office of Grants and Local Services.



PAST LAND STEWARDS IMPACTING OUTSIDE LANDS

The BCCER has continued to grow in every aspect of the organization, with the prior year seeing the largest staff roster to date. This past year, over 20 of our staff members parlayed their education and BCCER work experience into new positions and further education within natural resources management.

The staff attained new positions with agencies, organizations, and programs throughout California, the United States, and abroad.



Syd Godfrey



Logan Krahenbuhl



Cole Morales



Tyler Strahl



Kate Valdez

Some of the Highlights

Felipe Arballo, Forestry Technician, Sierra Timber Services

Cassie Corridoni, Biologist, Gallaway Enterprises

Meredith Berdeja, Wildlife Technician, Plumas National Forest

Brian Coffey, Land Steward, Higgins Ridge, LLC

Daniel Clauser, Scientific Aide, California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Syd Godfrey, Project Coordinator, The Sierra Fund

Dylan Golet, Hot Shots Crew, Plumas National Forest

Karina Haddad, Environmental Consultant, Gallaway Enterprises

Amanda Harwood, Forestry Aide, California Department of Parks and Recreation

Amanda Howey, Graduate Student, Victoria University Wellington (New Zealand)

Anthony Lepori, Forestry Technician, Sierra Timber Services

Logan Krahenbuhl, Project Manager, Plumas Underburn Cooperative

Madi Lloyd, Conservation Crew Lead, Feather River Resource Conservation District

Cole Morales, Tribal Liaison and Engagement Specialist, Chico State Enterprises

Claire Monahan, Monitoring Field Crew, Safford Lab at University of California, Davis

Heather Pendleton, 2023 Wilderness Ranger Fellow, Selway Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation

Tara Purcell, Naturalist, Walker Creek Ranch Science Camp

Tyler Strahl, Biologist Interpreter, North State Planning and Development Collective

Kate Valdez, Environmental Resources Technician, Merced County Regional Waste Management Authority

OUTDOOR CLASSROOM PROGRAM



The 2022–23 School Year witnessed a record in the number of students served with free field trips, as the demand for outdoor education increased for the second full school year since COVID canceled all field trips.

We had a great staff, including graduate students from our Wildland Management Program, Land Stewards, undergrads majoring in child development, biology, environmental science, and social science, California Climate Action Corps Fellows, and retired teachers who

volunteered their time. This program gives many students their first teaching experience and gives other employees experience in education and presenting to the public, which complements their field experiences.

In addition to the usual third, fourth, and fifth grade classes, we hosted a class of Chico State credential students and current K–12 teachers through the California Water Institute.

“Thank you for your expertise and excellence!”

—Elisa Huru, Oakdale Elementary



“I wanted to thank you and your staff for such an awesome day at BCEP! Despite the rain, everyone had a wonderful and memorable time learning in such a beautiful outdoor classroom. These experiences are invaluable to young scholars. Building knowledge is the real key to success in school. The staff was knowledgeable and had great management skills. Thank you again, and we look forward to seeing you next year with the next crop of third graders!”

—Alisha Stephens, Emma Wilson Elementary

ECOTHERAPY PROGRAM



Our Ecotherapy Program enjoyed another year of growth, deeper community connection, and impact. Thanks to funding from the North Valley Community Foundation and collaboration from many local organizations, we've continued to provide free professionally guided forest therapy in locations across Butte County. In addition, our programming has expanded to include research-based educational workshops for trauma and stress resilience, place-based outdoor education, and opportunities to participate in stewardship and restoration. We were also able to bring on a full-time program coordinator, Greg Shafer, who has been instrumental in increasing our services within the community, building relationships, and coordinating our many activities and events.

Thanks to the generous support from the North Valley Community Foundation's Butte Strong Fund, we served 1,035 community members last year. Our partnership with Chico State Basic Needs has enabled us to increase our presence on campus and continue to address the mental health crisis among college students. This partnership helped us reach 1,456 Chico State students and 107 staff and faculty members during the 2022–23 academic year. Since August 2022, at least 25% of participants we've served were directly impacted by a wildfire. Of the nearly 100 unique forest therapy sessions we provided, over 40 percent occurred in wildfire-affected communities.

Our program has received national media recognition from The Washington Post (2021 and 2022), Scripps News, and PBS for our success in serving folks impacted by the Camp Fire. Our program enjoys an ever-growing list of community partnerships and requests for services. Residents of our county are excited about our offerings and recognize that our relationship with the natural world is vital to our recovery, resilience, and connection.

"A forest therapy walk is an easy-to-access opportunity to connect with our local natural world and be healed by it. I truly feel that anyone could attend a walk and get something out of it. The experience and guides will meet you at your level and offer a chance to gently engage with restoration and connection."

—A forest therapy participant's reflections after attending a session.



RESEARCH AND ACTIVITY HIGHLIGHTS



North American Butterfly Association's annual butterfly count at the BCCER.



The BCCER hosted many college fields trips over the last year, such as these students from Chico State's Advanced Zoology.



BCCER staff and partners conducted a Rx burn in the Crane Mills area of Forest Ranch in May 2023.



The Shrub Club volunteer program participants conducted ecological restoration projects during the spring and summer at the BCCER.



Altacal Audubon Society's annual owl banding research takes place at the BCCER.



Biological Sciences students researching foliar fungal endophytes on leaf litter fungal communities.



FISHBIO team collecting environmental DNA samples to determine community composition.



Biological Sciences student groups researching various topics at the BCCER for semester projects.



FISHBIO and BCCER staff conducting snorkel surveys of Big Chico Creek.



Earth and Environmental Sciences student researching in-stream decomposition rates and leaf quality between native and non-native species.



FINANCIALS

Income	Amount
Program Income	\$1,423,584
Donations	\$60,368
State	\$300,000
TOTAL INCOME	\$1,783,951

Expenses	Amount
Operating Expenses	\$288,219
Contractors	\$77,385
Personnel (Salaries and Benefits)	\$1,212,057
Facilities and Administrative Costs	\$206,987
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$1,784,648

Thank you to our partners:



COMMUNITY SUPPORT

Legacy Level

Anita Chang
Elizabeth Colleran and Hollis Elliott
Wes Dempsey
Dempsey Family Endowment
Bruce Gallaway
Paul Lake
Paul Maslin
Colin Stokes

Mountain Lion

\$5,000+

Patricia Egan
Foor Foundation
Bruce and Penny Gallaway
Bob Henning and Jennifer Toth-Henning
Maggie Hill
Thomas Mello
North Valley Community Foundation
Resources Legacy Fund Foundation
Elizabeth Quail

Black Bear

\$1,000-\$4,000

Linda Allen and Gayle Hutchinson
Ellie Bradbury and Lionel Valley
Carol Burr and Roger Lederer
Trisha Edelmann
Mary Edwards
Lynn Ellis
Doug and Kelly Guerrero
David and Hilary Hassenzahl
Darrell and Susan Johnson
Sandra Kriezel
Debra Larson
Suzy McCreary
Ailsie McEngteggart
Marianne Paiva
Judy Robison
Emilyn Sheffield
Ann Sherman

Bobcat

\$700-\$999

Tag Engstrom and Kristine Mazzei
Phil Filbrandt and Joanne Reid
John Henning
Joyce Hill

Gray Fox

\$300-\$699

Greg and Marion Armstrong
Kristen Borges
Jim and Mary Johnson
Marti Leicester
Bonnie and Marv Megibow
Al Pritchard
Dave and Debra Scotto

Saw-whet Owl

\$299 and under

George and Laura Armstrong
Jack and Abe Baily
Sierra Baker
Florin Barnhart
Ciera Barsotti
Maryann Baumholser
Mary Kay Benson
Deborah Burgess
Kat Clark
Genevieve Brink-Capriola
Shaun-Adrian Chofla
Fernando and Stacie Corona
Mitch and Laura Cox
Gail Crandall
Jim Crane
Cynthia Cross
Cynthia Davis
Ron and Willow DeJesus
Kate Disney
Robin and Ian Donatello
David Donnell
Saurav Dutta
Michelle and Glen Eaton
Karen Edwards
Blake Ellis
Richard Elsom
Brandon Ertis
Thistle Funsten
Anne Goodsell
Jim and Michelle Graydon
Meredith Griffin
Brixie Hansen-Judge
Jessica Harrington-Patten and Ryan Patten
Adele Harth
Colleen Hatfield and Shahroukh Mistry
Skip and Nancy Hubbard
Thomas and Carol Huston
Madelyn Ibarra
David Idesis
Iola Ireland and Henry Crowhurst
Suzanne Janicki
Barbara Johnson
Thomas and Margaret Lee
James Martin
Margaret Martin
Tom and Marsha Martin
Jennifer Mays
Mike and Jennifer McKee
Greg and Christa Melton
Donald Miller
Signe Miller
Susan Miller
William Monroe
Patty Mullins
Joanne Nalin
David Neuschatz
Debra Nichols

Marilyn Noon

Ben Page
Kate Post
Patricia Puterbaugh and Germain Boivin
Tom and Patricia Reilly
Susan Roll
Eric Ruben
Peggy and Steve Schaefer
Nitsa and Irvin Schiffman
Margaret and Dennis Schmidt
Dulcy Schroeder
Kate Scowsmith
Greg Shafer
Karen Smith
Rachel Stengel
Anne and Paul Stephens
Tink Stephenson
Lisa Sumner
Tom and Mary Anne Thomson
Vivian Toy
Claudia Trout
Deborah Voekel and David Philhour
Julie Wakalee
Joan Walters
Deborah Weber
Amy West
Frank Willis



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