

# Regional Parks Association

March 30, 2003

## Annual Meeting – Membership Breakfast

### Guest Speaker:

**Richard Rayburn**

**Chief, Natural Resources Division  
California State Parks**

**Topic:** *Natural Landscape Preservation & Role of Livestock Grazing  
in Park Preservation*

Joe Engbeck introduced Mr. Rayburn. He graduated from UCLA and studied forestry as graduate student at Humboldt State University. After graduating he joined the US Forest Service and has been with California State Park System (CSPS) for the last 16 yrs. Those who work in his department are true believers in maintaining a natural environment in the state parks.

Mr. Rayburn started out by naming three of his favorite books that relate to the topic of his talk. These were:



### **The Song of the Dodo: Island Biogeography in an Age Of Extinctions**

by [David Quammen](#)

This is a book on conservation biology that interweaves observation, scientific theory, and history. This is an excellent book written more for the general population rather than the scientific community. The book covers preservation and the massive species loss due to habitat fragmentation.

### **The Beak of the Finch: A Story of Evolution in Our Time**

by [Jonathan Weiner](#)

This book discusses Darwinian evolution on a desert island in the heart of the Galapagos archipelago, where Darwin received his first inklings of the theory of evolution. The book discusses the evolutionary changes of Finch beaks, which occurs by generation rather than over thousands of years.

### **Saving Nature's Legacy: Protecting and Restoring Biodiversity**

by [Reed F. Noss](#) and Allen Cooperrider

Reed Noss is a consultant in ecology and conservation biology, science director for The Wildlands Project, and editor of Conservation Biology. Allen Cooperrider is a consultant in conservation biology who previously worked 17 years for the BLM. This is a book intended for the scientific community but is a good book on biodiversity and it discusses impacts of cattle grazing. The book was published by the Island Press and the authors were hired by the Defenders of Wildlife to write the book.

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Talk outline:

- ◆ history of grazing in CSPS
- ◆ CSPA management philosophy
- ◆ grazing in parklands

Mr. Rayburn indicated that none of his talk about grazing was intended to be negative. The focus will not be whether grazing is right or wrong but rather on where it is done and under what circumstances.

The choice of the use of grazing is dependent upon the mission and goals of each agency. He indicated that he was not familiar with the mission and goals of the EBRPD, which may be different from the CSPA and NPS.

- Grazing is not helpful in managing natural resources if the goal is their preservation.
- Grazing makes a little money but not enough to justify it. Support staff and overall costs of managing such programs generally make them not profitable.
- Starker Leopold picked 5 wildlife biologists to determine management of resources. A blue-ribbon panel review was essence of how parks are managed today. The report can be found at the NPS website [http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online\\_books/leopold/leopold.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/history/online_books/leopold/leopold.htm)
- CSPA manages for all species, not favoring one over another
- Artificial processes detract from natural processes
- What time frame should be considered for the focus natural resource preservation -- when land was purchased? It was late 1700's before Europeans arrived with cattle. CSPA focus is to manage for what land looked like prior to arrival of cattle brought by the Europeans.
- CSPA focuses expenditures on natural processes as opposed to species corrections.
- CSPA goes after exotic species with vigor – these are an impediment to natural processes.
- CSPA is taking corrective action to support native processes
- Burning is an alternative method
- Drainage is also a big factor – CSPA is trying to reestablish natural flow instead of hydrological flow from previous erosion damage
- BLM – has multiple use focus
- USF&WS – has threatened & endangered species focus
- CSPA & NPS have a pure preservation focus; CSPA focus is quite narrow in this regard.

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It is difficult to be flexible with the grazing issue. If you are going to allow grazing, you have to be very specific about how and when it will be used. We must also be careful of precedents.

There are 3 reasons where they allow grazing:

1. Ecological reasons -- these must be very carefully specified.
  - grazing is an artificial process -- we've removed elk pronghorn from the ranges. Cows are very different from elk in their forage use. The way they move is quite different, while elk lightly graze & move on, cattle do not. Cows are very different and cannot be considered equivalent in their impacts. Cows also congregate in riparian areas, damaging stream-bank vegetation.
  - fences required for grazing diminish high quality recreation. They diminish the experience that nature and solitude bring.
  - cow feces detracts from the experience as well
  - cattle take water from natural sources (artificial process)
  - ranchers claim they can overcome these problems. While they claim that their efforts have led to improved range lands, their claims are usually relevant to "hammered" already grazed lands.
2. There is little ranchers can do to improve parklands with grazing. However, there are special circumstances.
  - occasionally the purchase price is reduced if grazing is allowed for a limited period of time.
  - CSPA allows cultural mission and resource interpretation, which is permitted strictly for historic purposes. e.g. Fort Ross on Sonoma coast. CSPA may allow a 2000 acre cattle ranching park for this purpose in the future.
  - grazing is allowed at Blackhawk in return for interpretive activities by rancher.
  - grazing to benefit natural resource management -- this option has very limited application and value in his opinion. There may be an opportunity to create natural grasslands by allowing the land to be grazed hard when annuals are coming up and let native perennials come up after the fact. John Menke has done some work on this (UC Davis).

Tim Gordon's comment -- what about wildlife that are living in the grasses that you are destroying for the purpose of restoration of the natives?
  - control of coyote brush -- ranchers insist this is necessary. Mr. Rayburn doesn't necessarily buy that argument.
3. Fire control is often another reason stipulated for the use of grazing. However, there are other alternatives. Mr. Rayburn does not agree that grazing is the answer to the fire problem. CSPA has done fire studies and found that many grazing claims are unfounded when it comes to its effectiveness when compared to the alternative options, including not grazing. Each CSPA park has a wildfire management plan, which costs about 10K/yr.

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Often agencies claim that grazing does "double-duty", that is, create income & protect against fire.

150K acres grazed in CSPA in 1950's; it has been reduced to 12K today.

John Sutter – can you compare CSPA vs NPS grazing policies?

- During the late 1980's when CSPA removed grazing from Mt. Diablo, a judge had a hearing because ranchers thought the CSPA had been a little "heavy handed". During this session it was declared that in NPS there were 265 parks that had grazing, which totally shocked him. Then they said they were all trespassing cattle!!
- CSPA & NPS do not allow grazing except for interpretive reasons.
- USF&WS permitted grazing in certain areas for kit fox species to provide easier access to prey.

Nature Conservancy – has less of an objection to grazing. Much of what they buy is keeping open space from being developed, while protecting biodiversity is not of significant importance. They are mainly purchasing lands for promoting and continuing agricultural activities. Mr. Rayburn was not in favor of NC approach – conservation as opposed to preservation.

7500 acres were grazed at Mt Diablo. Pine Creek and Mitchell creek had little diversity - no shrub layer just annual grasses. Nature Conservancy pays little attention to such things.

An RPA member indicated that Vasco Caves sheep grazing was creating a very good display of native grasses. Mr. Rayburn commented that livestock grazing for this purpose must be done very carefully and can only be allowed to occur for a short period of time.

On behalf of the RPA, Joe Engbeck presented Mr. Rayburn with a copy of Welfare Ranching in gratitude for coming to speak to us.