



Regional Parks Association NEWSLETTER

January 2004

RPA Board Members

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SUNOL-OHLONE LUP SEVERELY CRITICIZED

Cattle Grazing Program Primary Target of Criticism

The Land Use Plan (LUP) for the Sunol-Ohlone Regional Wilderness was released by EBRPD last summer and in October the final public meeting was held to get public comment on it. Cattle grazing and its negative impacts received by far the most comments. The ranching community spoke for continuing "business as usual" - grazing cattle in this wilderness area. However, the environmental groups and other public agencies were very concerned about the position that the park district had taken on this issue throughout its LUP process. One district document stated:

"Public agency managers and elected officials will need to make a long-term commitment to livestock grazing and demonstrate resolve when it is challenged."

And challenged it now is! EBRPD received so many comment letters (including one from RPA) that it was forced to postpone its December approval by 3-6 months until it could respond to all of the public comments.

CA Regional Water Quality Control Board Expresses Concerns over LUP

A letter from the **California Regional Water Quality Control Board**, the State agency charged with protecting water quality in California, responded with a 9-page letter, primarily criticizing the grazing plan in the LUP. Here are a few excerpts from the letter (the full letter can be accessed on the RPA website):

"... the Negative Declaration and LUP do not address significant ongoing grazing impacts, do not make a substantive connection between how grazing is presently practiced on the Project site and how that practice achieves the multiple uses/goals identified in EBRPD's 1997 Master Plan... These uses include...: recreation; wildlife habitat; habitat for rare, threatened, and endangered species; water quality; public access; cultural value; and, scenic value... (RPA note: cattle grazing not included here!)...and do not identify and clearly evaluate alternative management methods that could achieve the range of goals identified, while reducing ongoing impacts...it does not appear that EBRPD has satisfied its CEQA responsibilities. We are concerned that the use of cattle grazing, as presently practiced on the subject lands, can cause and contribute to

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significant impacts to water quality and beneficial uses of waters of the State, including, but not limited to: erosion, compaction, and removal of vegetation, leading to discharge of sediment to waters of the State through rainfall/runoff erosion and mass wasting; discharge of pathogens and material with biological oxygen demand to waters of the State via cattle waste; and, loss of riparian vegetation through trampling and grazing of riparian species."

Since EBRPD grazes nearly 60% of its total lands, grazing – both from a public safety viewpoint and from the environmental damage it does – this Sunol-Ohlone Wilderness LUP has huge significance on the future grazing policies of the District. The RPA Board will continue to monitor and weigh in on this issue. Your comments would be greatly appreciated.

RPA Concerns about Park District Fire Suppression Measures

Wildfire! The word is virtually synonymous with fast-moving disaster. We picture great tongues of flame racing out of control through a forest or some other natural landscape. We think emergency! And we look for the quick response, fast action and heroic measures designed to put fire out and minimize or prevent property damage.

This view of wildfire is seared into our minds by the headlines and dramatic images used by the media to report wildfire situations. But most of the realities associated with fire in wildlands and along the wildland/urban interface are far more complex, subtle and slow to develop. They have to do with weather and climate patterns, and with the slowly evolving realities of natural plant succession.

The ***East Bay Regional Park District*** tends to respond to these complexities in two ways. For one thing they maintain a fire department, fight fires on EBRPD lands, and participate in multi-agency "red flag days"- - those 12 or 15 days every autumn when truly dangerous fire

conditions exist in the East Bay Region. The District has also given itself over to the idea that "brush is bad and grass is good" from a fire safety point of view. In order to reduce "fuel buildup" at minimal expense, the District permits commercial cattle grazing on about 60% of the land that has been entrusted to it. The result is widespread devastation of natural ecosystems in the name of "brush suppression" and the "maintenance or expansion of grassland areas.

Fire safety is important. But parks should also be managed for park purposes including the preservation of natural landscapes for the inspiration, education, and pleasure of the people. Some RPA members believe that the District's present policies with regard to commercial cattle grazing, vegetation management, and fire-safety need review and revision based on the best available scientific research and professional park management standards. Please let us know if you would like to work on this issue. Perhaps we can help the District adopt a well balanced, comprehensive, and enlightened approach to vegetation management and fire safety.

Controversial Dam Measure on Contra Costa County Ballot

Measure N on the March 2, 2004 ballot is a request by the ***Contra Costa Water District*** for voters in its service area to approve plans to enlarge the Los Vaqueros reservoir from 100,000 acre feet to 500,000 acre feet. This expansion will require the dismantling of the present \$450 million reservoir completed just four years ago. When Los Vaqueros bond was approved by voters in 1988, CCWD's Board promised it would improve water quality and provide drought protection for its current water customers and that it would not be used to fuel growth in Contra Costa nor to further the goals of a peripheral canal-type project to export Delta water to southern California. Many believe this new proposal will violate those principles; RPA, Sierra Club and EBRPD Directors Radke and Siri are

among those opposing the project.

The original project also provided recreational amenities as well as extensive mitigation for the endangered species destroyed by the dam. A bigger dam would wipe all this out.

Environmentalists (including RPA) and rate payers asked for an environmental impact statement to evaluate the effects of this proposal before it was placed before the voters but no document has been prepared.

Although the affected land itself is Water District owned, the proposal would inundate miles of current and promised trails, including vital connections to EBRPD trails.

If you live in the CC Water District or have friends who do, please be sure your vote is an informed one.

Good News!! Gateway Valley Project Bans Cattle Grazing on Planned Open Space

The developers of the Gateway Valley project have REMOVED all cattle grazing from their proposed mitigation plan; this in response to the public's and agencies' concerns about the detrimental effects of cattle grazing in this watershed. HURRAH!

(**NOTE:** the project still has not received its state and federal permits, nor has a final development plan been through the approval process of the City of Orinda)

Get Involved!! Save the Creeks!!

Last November, Contra Costa County hosted a **Creeks and Watersheds Symposium**, more than 300 persons attended. Some attendees were long time creek advocates while others have become involved within the last 2 years. Attendees included elected officials, staff members for a number of agencies, as well as development interests.

This symposium was a follow up to the first one held in 1999 which heralded a new environmental approach to creeks and to

watersheds in Contra Costa County. For some of the participants it was a long overdue recognition of the principles they have advocated for 20 years.

The symposium illustrated accomplishments in community involvement, an understanding of the roles of the creeks, and acceptance of methods of living with creeks without destroying them. This change was a result of a change in county staff which in turn brought a major shift in the outlook on the issues around creeks. In addition, the group produced an impressive Watershed Atlas, a priceless document for anyone involved in planning and open space issues. For information on obtaining a copy, contact the Contra Costa Community Development Department (925) 335 1290

RPA Hike -- If you stayed at home that day, you missed a good one!

Last September RPA members had a wonderful walk in EBRPD's **Coyote Hills Regional Park**. We trod the boardwalks through the marshes and viewed the Indian shellmound in the archeological area. We heard about various issues including the invasion of non-native grasses, issues that will be addressed this spring by a new Land Use Plan for this Fremont park area. And of course, broke bread together on picnic tables under the wonderful old trees.

And by now the **Monarch butterflies** should be wintering behind the Visitor center there – and at Ardenwood and maybe Point Pinole too. Check it out.

Or take a stroll on South Park Drive across from Botanic Garden and look for **California Newts crossing**.

Need an excuse to eat cake?

Celebrate EBRPD's 70th birthday *anytime* this year! And though RPA often worries about certain District policies, there is no doubt that this is a truly remarkable park district and one worth celebrating! Happy Birthday EBRPD!