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# REGIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION N E W S L E T T E R

November 2006

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*RPA Board Members*

*President: Amelia Wilson, Vice-president: Joe Engbeck, Treasurer: Pete Wilson, Secretary: Judi Bank  
Tim Gordon Hulet Hornbeck, Kathleen Nimr, Carroll Williams*

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## Livestock Grazing in Our East Bay Regional Parks

By Joe Engbeck

Carroll Williams, a retired Forest Service scientist and adjunct professor at U. C. Berkeley, as well as a member of RPA's board of directors, has compiled a thoughtful analysis of the East Bay Regional Park District's cattle grazing policies and programs. The full text of his statement will be published by RPA as a white paper at some point in the

future. Meanwhile, here is a brief summary of his findings and conclusions.

Professor Williams points out that the Park District has repeatedly stated that it intends to use grazing as its "primary vegetation management tool." Williams also points out, however, that the District does not adequately monitor and evaluate its grazing program to determine whether current practices are meeting even the most clearly established management objectives.

Putting his comments into historical perspective, Williams reminds us that California's native grasslands and oak savannas evolved over the centuries and the millennia into a magnificent sea of perennial bunch grasses, shrubs, and flowering herbaceous plants that covered nearly 40 million acres- or about 40 percent of California's total land area. Those grasslands were adapted to California's summer-dry Mediterranean climate, and to fire, drought, and grazing by native herbivores. Once cattle were introduced to California in the 18th century, however, California's native grasslands were rapidly and severely damaged by excessive and unregulated livestock grazing, with the result that native bunch grasses were largely replaced by annual grasses and by thistles and other non-native plants, trees and shrubs.

Williams agrees that fire safety, revenue production, and various ecological factors including grassland restoration all deserve to be considered in the District's grazing policies, but he does not agree that simply defining management objectives is sufficient. The District needs to monitor and evaluate its current program on a regular basis (quarterly and/or annually) in order to know whether or not its management objectives are being achieved.

This is an important question for our region because the Park District currently permits livestock grazing on about 57,400 acres of livestock grazing on Park District land. That amounts to more than 60 percent of the Park District's total land base. Revenue from livestock grazing currently comes to about \$400,000 per year, but thoughtful and thorough cost/benefit studies have not been done to enable either the public at large or the Park District board of directors to properly evaluate that aspect of the District's grazing program.

Williams believes that the District's board of directors should immediately call for the development of specific grazing plans for each of the District's 55 grazing leases. He also believes that regular monitoring and annual evaluations must be conducted by staff in order to verify compliance with the terms of each individual grazing lease and the overall goals of the program.

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*Carroll Williams is a retired Forest Service scientist and adjunct professor emeritus in the College of Natural Resources at the University of California, Berkeley. As a project leader for the Forest Service, Carroll led teams of research scientists who examined the interactions of insects, pathogens, fire, and human activities and their impacts on the health of western coniferous forests and the balsam fir, white spruce, and northern hardwood forests in the eastern United States and Canada. Following forty years with the Forest Service, Carroll joined the U.C. faculty in 1988 where he developed and taught courses on the conservation and health of forest and woodland ecosystems in California. In addition to his professional work, Carroll was twice elected to the Berkeley School Board, serving from 1977 to 1983. In 1991 he was appointed by the Board of the East Bay Regional Park District to complete the term of Director Mary Jefferds.*

**A NOTE FROM ONE OF OUR MEMBERS CONCERNING GRAZING:** "The article about sudden oak death in the latest issue of " Bay Nature" magazine was informative about one major threat to our oak woodlands, Sudden Oak Death (SOD) but ignored the 800-pound gorilla, namely cattle grazing in our parks. Because cattle destroy oak seedlings, all the trees in areas that are grazed are mature or even senescent. While SOD may or may not cause complete devastation of our local oaks, there is no doubt that as today's oaks die, our hillsides will be denuded and those parklands which are grazed will not have young oaks to succeed them. Concentrating so much energy on SOD while ignoring the politically sensitive topic of grazing in parks makes no sense. If we're going to discuss threats to oak woodlands, let's discuss all of them!"

## **GOOD NEWS, HOWEVER...**

(from 10-04-06 EBMUD/EBRPD Liason Committee Meeting Report)

### **"BRIONES WATERSHED PROTECTION PLAN**

Wildland Vegetation Manager David Amme explained that staff had reached an agreement on removing cattle from the Briones watershed during the 2007-2008 wet seasons with summer grazing continuing for the next two years. He discussed the plans for fence work and commended the collaborative process to come up with a solution. EBMUD and EBRPD Board members and staff commented on the positive cooperative efforts to plan, share costs and implement these changes. EBMUD Director of Operation and Maintenance, Mike Wallis, noted that the extensive water quality testing and monitoring EBMUD will conduct over the next two years will establish an important baseline regarding water quality protection that can be used in the future to evaluate the impacts of modified grazing operations [The agreement was formally signed November 3, documenting resources and responsibilities.

## **WAY TO GO, EBRPD!**

### **CHECK YOUR ADDRESS LABEL**

If your name has an asterisk by it, you are a star! You've paid your 2006 dues. If **not**, please renew your Regional Parks Association membership by sending your \$20 today to RPA treasurer Pete Wilson .

**More good news.....**

### **An Exciting Prospect for Cooperative Action on Grazing**

Two members of the East Bay Chapter of CNPS (the California Native Plant Society) met with the RPA board of directors on Monday, November 6 to describe their organization's current efforts and longer range plans to bring about improved resource management policies in our East Bay Regional Parks - - especially with regard to cattle grazing.

Lech Naumovich, the East Bay

Conservation Analyst for CNPS, and

Peter Rauch, long-time CNPS volunteer, shared their organization's thinking about how Park District grazing practices could be improved so as to do a better job of protecting native plants and ecosystems for the education and inspiration of the public.

CNPS is proposing that the Vargas Plateau Regional Park be used in part as a pilot study area for understanding how to more effectively utilize grazing as a tool for managing grasslands in the regional parks. Rauch and Naumovich pointed out the need for more and better scientific studies of cattle grazing policies and procedures, and recommended that special attention be given to investigating the effect of timing of grazing on native plant populations. They also emphasized the need for grazing practices to be tailored to specific sites. Local differences in soil, climate, etc. are major variables and must be carefully considered.

RPA agrees with all of these conclusions and recommendations! We look forward to

working closely and cooperatively with CNPS and other environmental organization as well as East Bay Regional Park District to bring improved cattle grazing practices to our regional parks.

a lovely pinkish lavender, photo courtesy CNPS website

## A FRAGILE LITTLE GEM

Restoration of the Serpentine Prairie area, behind Trudeau Training Center is in the works at EBRPD. Staff presented a [Draft Serpentine Prairie Resource Restoration Plan](#) at the Operations Committee meeting in September, that includes inventory and assessment, education, implementation of restoration activities, monitoring and adjustment. The land was once a horse pasture. Later, and until the 1980's, it was used for practicing equestrian jumping.



More recently, dog owners discovered it. Proximity to the Trudeau Training Center parking lot meant too many people congregating on the flat area tossing balls to their dogs. The dogs may have been happy, but the heavy use absolutely denuded the area. And that denuding threaten local extinction for the Presidio Clarkia, an endangered plant, as well as several other rare plants and bunch grasses. Presidio Clarkia occurs on only three sites within a mile of each other in Alameda County and two sites at the San Francisco Presidio. The District will be meeting with the Native Plant Society and user groups before finalizing the plan. Restoration will take about five years.

## RPA Board

What does the RPA Board do when they're not having their monthly Board meetings? Why, go to OTHER meetings, of course. We keep in touch with what is happening at EBRPD by receiving the Board packet twice a month and attending EBRPD committee meetings: Finance committee, Operations committee, Natural and Cultural Resources committee, Ecology committee and Legislative committee. The Finance and Operations committees meet monthly and the Natural and Cultural Resources and the Ecology committees meet about 4 times a year. And then, each RPA board member belongs to other environmental groups –more meetings to share with each other. And out of all that come letters to write, petitions to sign, plans and EIR's and the like to critique. We'd be delighted to have you sit in on our monthly meetings and share your news and knowledge with us.