



REGIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

March 2007

RPA Board Members

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

Why is RPA so concerned with grazing issues?

The following are only two examples of a much larger picture concerning grazing impacts

For several weeks, beginning January 11 into February, the gates of Sindicich and Marich Lagoons in Briones Regional Park were opened the 400 cattle who graze there. January's lack of rain which reduced the size of ponds normally used by cattle coupled with inadequate or non-functioning watering troughs precipitated these breaches to the lagoon enclosures. A hiker in the area reported, "The middle lagoon is being severely impacted by cattle as I write this. I counted 6 cows in the lagoon area (quite terrorizing the ducks who had skittered away to the opposite shore) And of course, a lot of degraded shoreline – trampled reeds, disturbed mud, paths cut through reeds to the water. A sign, dated January 11, 2007 reads: 'Lagoon gates/fences are purposely opened to allow cattle to water and to reduce vegetation inside the fence. (I observed little vegetation to be reduced at this time of year) Once the water levels rise we will close the fences. (signed Briones staff....)' This sign hangs right next to an older metal sign that reads "Sensitive Habitat." Cows yes, native critters no?

This is not the first time over the past twenty years that grazing's negative effects on native amphibians in the Sindicich lagoons have been raised. In the early 1990's, the issue seemed to be resolved to favor amphibian breeding by creating that "Sensitive Habitat" zone, and designating breeding times when cattle needed to be excluded, including January the most

sensitive month of the year, a time when water should be trucked in to meet cattle needs instead of opening the gates.

The good news is that herons and buffle heads have returned, the fence which was in poor condition in January, repaired, and best of all – THE GATES ARE ONCE AGAIN CLOSED.

In a second example, an increasing number of cattle have been grazing in the beautiful oak woodlands of the Reliez Creek area of Briones since December 2005 without an installed water system. The springs and upper creek area near Buckeye and Sunrise trails have been trampled into a muddy quagmire. Numerous trails have been cut by cattle to the water. Vegetation has been chomped and trampled. EBRPD Wildlands Vegetation Program Manager David Amme acknowledged the "deleterious impact of the cattle in the spring area as well as the trampled creekbed immediately downstream from the springs," in a letter Nov. 21, 2006.

After numerous verbal and written promises from EBRPD and the leaseholder, dating back a year, the leaseholder began fencing the springs and creek and installing a water system this January. That was after the City of Lafayette Public Works Department became interested in the issue. The work was finally completed February 19. The trough is now full of water, yet at this writing, the newly installed gate to the creek area stands

wide open, allowing the cows continued access. Recovery will take a long time.

In both cases above, EBRPD justified cattle grazing as beneficial and environmentally sound.

That's why RPA's annual meeting will feature Elizabeth Painter, a professional botanist who will talk about "Livestock grazing – Myths and Realities."

RPA ANNUAL MEETING SUNDAY APRIL 22

9:30 BREAKFAST (\$3.00) 10:00 Business meeting and featured speaker Elizabeth Painter

"Livestock Grazing - Myths and Realities"

Hosted by Steve Abbors, EBMUD Project Manager, at the lovely
EBMUD Watershed Headquarters 500 San Pablo Dam Road, Orinda

Beth Painter (Ph.D) is well known for her expertise as a plant ecologist and her research in plant/herbivore interactions. Her graduate degrees are in both botany and range science from Colorado State. She was a research associate at the Departments of Biology, Range Ecosystem Science, Forestry, before affiliating with University of California. Her research has focused on the impacts of large native herbivores on native plants and how these differ from the impacts of alien herbivores (domestic and feral). She has advised a number of conservation groups on public land grazing issues and been an expert witness in livestock-grazing-related legal cases involving national parks. "I strongly believe," she emphasizes, "the best way to improve ecological conditions of public lands used as rangeland is to manage them using best available science." A most dynamic speaker and established research scientist, she is in a position to share her objective observations and conclusions on a controversial subject.

See you April 22!!

2007 dues due!

Name _____

Address____(IF
CHANGED)_____

Mail to:Pete Wilson, Treasurer
\$20 dues enclosed
35 Lost Valley Drive
Orinda CA 94563
\$250 life membership

Star by your name on address label? You've paid
2007 dues! No star? We hope your check is in the
mail!
