



# REGIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

December 2004

*RPA Board Members*

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## NEW RESEARCH TAKES HARD LOOK AT OLD FIRE / VEGETATION MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Wildfire and vegetation management policy was the main subject of discussion at the RPA board of directors meeting, Monday, December 6, 2004. Our guest speaker was Professor Max Moritz from the University of California, Berkeley.

Professor Moritz has been studying California's wildfire issues for a decade or more. He is relatively new to the San Francisco Bay Area, and much of his research has focused on southern and central California—especially the Los Padres National Forest area. But now that he is at Cal, he hopes to apply the lessons he has learned in those areas to the wildfire and associated vegetation management issues that we face here in the San Francisco Bay Area and the East Bay in particular. This is very good news for both RPA and the EBRPD because much remains to be learned about our region's wildfire and vegetation management issues. Remember, as Jon Keeley showed us at our last general membership meeting, grazing livestock and other kinds of traditional fuel breaks are not always effective fire safety measures, nor are they necessarily the best way to spend our limited funds for fire safety. It seems likely that the

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research Professor Moritz wants to do will lead to new and better—i.e., more cost effective, and particularly more environmentally appropriate and more fire-wise land management policies in the next few months and years.

As most RPA members read in the newspaper, long-time EBRPD General Manager Richard Trudeau died November 22. During his years as EBRPD General Manager, 1968-1985, the Park District grew from 19 parks and 20,000 acres to 45 parks and more than 60,000 acres. RPA members were privileged to hold last year's Annual Breakfast at the newly renovated and newly named Richard Trudeau Training Center. RPA has made a memorial gift contribution to the Regional Parks Foundation in the name of all our members.

# HAPPY BIRTHDAY EAST BAY PARKS!

This November marked the East Bay Regional Park District's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, and the voters in the western part of the District have given EBRPD a big present: passage of Measure CC. The measure won with 67.2% of the votes. Residents in Oakland, Berkeley, Albany, El Cerrito, Alameda, Emeryville, Kensington, Piedmont and parts of Richmond, Pinole and San Pablo will see \$12 a year added to their tax bill; 57% will be used for maintenance and opening of landbanked parks, and 33% will go toward natural resource and habitat protection.

Projects planned are diverse: replacing roofs on Tilden Little Farm barns, opening up the Stone property (near Caldecott tunnel) and re-establishing its ponds' habitat value, extending trails in Wildcat, Pt. Pinole Shoreline and around Golden Gate Fields, replacing chemical toilets with flush toilets, and enhancing habitat for black and clapper rail and Caspian tern.

Regional Parks Association congratulates EBRPD and looks forward to the District accomplishing the long list of projects promised funding during Measure CC's 15 year life span.

## MORE GOOD NEWS

Another "birthday present" for the District was the August signing of an agreement with the owners of the Gateway property for the District to eventually receive over 900 acres of open space land. Much of the land adjoins Sibley Preserve and runs southward towards Upper San Leandro Reservoir.

For those of you who have followed the 16 year Gateway Valley saga, resolution came last summer. Save Open Space – Gateway Valley, Golden Gate Audubon and the Sierra Club had spent two years negotiating a settlement agreement which eliminated the golf course, substantially reduced environmental impacts, confined housing to the north end and preserved 1400 acres of open space, in return for which the environmental groups accepted the limited development proposed. The remaining southernmost open space acreage will go to East Bay Municipal Utility District to be managed as part of its watershed.

Grazing will be permitted on environmental mitigation lands BUT ONLY in the manner that EBMUD uses: dry season, short time, with creeks and wetlands fenced.

That is not generally EBRPD's policy, for in many cases cattle remain on Park land throughout the year, causing far more harm than good. RPA hopes that the ultimate benefits of the Gateway restrictions will confirm the need to modify EBRPD's grazing practices.

## **IMPORTANT LUP'S ON DECK**

The Park District is currently in the process of Land Use Planning for Sibley Volcanic Preserve. The purpose of this proposed amendment is to integrate 272 acres of land banked properties into Sibley. Plan calls for new staging areas, group campsites, picnic sites etc. A public meeting will be held in Oakland (call EBRPD) December 16, and a thirty day comment period **ends December 29**.

Additionally, the LUP for opening Sycamore Valley may be heard early in 2005 by the EBRPD board. This also is an important one for RPA members to comment on, especially concerning the grazing issues about which we have long been deeply concerned.

The Sunol LUP is on hold because of the Negative Declaration concerning grazing issues there. EBRPD has hired a consulting firm to look at options to avoid litigation and to prepare the Fuel Management EIR/EIS required by passage of Measure CC. That firm will also explore the advantages for preparing a district-wide Habitat Conservation Plan.

**HALLELUJAH, RPA SAYS! GREAT IDEA!**

## **WHO WAS AURELIA REINHARDT?**

It is appropriate that Aurelia Reinhardt be recognized this birthday year for, in 1934, she was a founding member of EBRPD and the only woman on the Board. (She was also president of Mills College in her spare time!) A new dedication plaque has been placed in the 735 acre redwood grove that bears her name in Redwood Regional Park. So when next you are walking in this popular EBRPD park, give a salute to this remarkable woman.

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## **HAIRY WEEVIL NOT DOING ITS JOB**

Yellow Star Thistle's spread remains a perplexing problem in EBRPD parklands. In 1994, four insects were released in a test area in Briones Park: seed head weevil, Hairy weevil, seed head gall fly and false Peacock fly. But there has been no visible impact on this dreadful invasive weed.

Why? No one is quite sure but it may be that those insects come from Greece where they did a good job eliminating Greek Star Thistle, but our thistle comes from many different places. Or maybe it can be chalked up to different weather patterns. Guess you can't fool Mother Nature.

## **HELP HELP!**

RPA has an open position on the Board. We need your ideas and enthusiasm. And, anyone out there who would take on the job of formatting the newsletter? Do call Amelia at 925-376-6925

**GET OUT THERE AND ENJOY** Many RPA members now belong to the "Over the Hill" category. But that has a different meaning for our membership, because many members are doing just that – hiking up and over the hills of the East Bay Regional Park system. For those who now choose somewhat smaller hills, however, there is a **December 14** hike in Tilden, and a **January 25** El Sobrante Ridge ramble. Call 510-525-2233 for details. Or learn how plants cope with winter at the Botanic Garden 10-12 noon **December 19**.

How about "Winter Flowers on the Ridge"? Rare mananzita in bloom on Sobrante Ridge 10-1 **January 16**. Meet at end of Coach Drive in El Sobrante.

And since many RPA members are grandparents, check out these opportunities for sharing generational excursions:

Butterfly walks in December and/or a visit to the grand new Butterfly House at Coyote Hills.

Or charm the grandkids with banana slugs on a 2 hour walk/program at Tilden **December 18<sup>th</sup>**.

Who can resist "Why Does a Newt Cross the Road?", a great way to start 2005, trekking up South Park Drive **January 2** with a ranger?

No grandkids? Take your dog on a special walk on a crisp December day.

No grandkids, no animals? Then try the newly renovated Tilden Golf course. It is now playable all year with a computerized irrigation system that saves water, fertilizer and pesticides, and avoids creating "wetlands" where they shouldn't be.

Missed the newt hike on South Drive? Do a 5 miler looking for newts in Briones **January 30**.

Phone for details, then phone a friend and get out there and enjoy some of those 95,000 EBRPD acres which encompass our very special 2-county "backyard".