



REGIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

March 2005

RPA Board Members

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

NEW EBRPD WILDLIFE PROGRAM MANAGER TO ADDRESS RPA

Everyone is cordially invited to attend the **56th Annual Meeting** of the **Regional Parks Association, Sunday morning, April 17 in the Garden Room, Orinda Library.** Breakfast begins at 9:30, business meeting at 10:00. We are especially pleased to have Dr. Douglas Bell (see box) as our speaker. He will talk about *Using Prairie Falcons to Promote Habitat Conservation Planning*, relating his current research at Pinnacles National Monument to the Greater East Bay Area. "It's a global approach to assessing current habitat needs of wildlife in our parks," Dr. Bell says. Bird watchers among us can expect some fine slides.

RPA business will include a treasurer's report and elections, and the membership will be asked to ratify amendments to the by-laws (see included sheet) and a re-statement of goals and purposes.

Four positions on the board are open. Three are for a three year term: Joe Engbeck and Harlan Kessel currently fill two of those positions. The fourth seat open is for a one year period to complete the term of Alan LaPointe, who resigned in January 2005. Please consider becoming a Board member.

The Orinda Library is located at 24 Orinda Way, an easy ¼ mile walk from BART, has street parking and garage parking under the building itself. The Garden Room is on the second level, reached either by elevator or up the wide stairs at the rear of the patio. RPA members, families and friends, EBRPD staff and Directors – all are very welcome. Breakfast will be \$5 this year. For further information, call 925-376-6925. Please join us for our yearly event and a wonderful opportunity to meet this impressive new addition to the Park District staff.

Douglas Bell, PH.D new Wildlife Program Manager at EBRPD, will be keynote speaker at RPA's Annual Meeting. Dr. Bell began his responsibilities with the District March 1 on a part-time basis until he finishes the quarter at California State University Sacramento where he has been a Professor of Conservation Biology, Wildlife Management and Ornithology,. Born and raised In East Bay, degrees from Humboldt State, University of Munster, Germany and U.C. Berkeley, he has worked with California Academy of Sciences, the Peregrine Fund, and San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. He comes to the District with a strong research background and a tremendous amount of field experience.

BUSY TIMES FOR

RPA BOARD

The RPA Board has had a full plate these first three months of 2005. In addition to drafting responses to proposed Land Use Plans for Sibley Preserve, Sycamore Valley Preserve and Coyote Hills Regional Park (see page 3), Board members have dealt with three other documents: a protocol for Board members concerning when and how they may endorse measures or make public statements using RPA designation, an update of RPA By-Laws, and a restatement of RPA Goals and Purposes, which will be presented April 17 to the RPA membership.

Enclosed you will find proposed changes to the RPA By-Laws which have not been updated for 55 years, except for the dues amount. (Original 1947 dues were \$1!) RPA expenses have risen because of the \$250/year web site cost, printing and postage increases. The suggested wording in red is what the Board felt needed to be changed. A vote will be taken at the Annual Meeting April 17. If you cannot attend, please email or write us with your agreement or suggested amendments.

In February we abandoned wordsmithing for awhile. Pete and Amelia Wilson and Joe Engbeck were invited to the Berkeley Albany Emeryville League of Women Voters Environmental Concerns Committee (three members of which are also RPA members) to talk about RPA and our concerns about the Sibley Preserve LUP, especially EBRPD plans for a 300 person campground on the Stone property addition to Sibley .

Several Guests Attend RPA Monthly Board Meetings

The Board has also had several guests at Board meetings. In February, Professor Reginald Barrett from University of California gave us an update on the grassland study project he is helping to supervise for EBRPD. This is the third year of the study, and although valuable data is being acquired, the more they learn, the more they need to know! According to Barrett, the management and health of grasslands is far more complicated and intricate than previously understood. EBRPD

has funded the project through 2005 but more needs to be done. RPA believes this is a very valuable study – and economical, too, using U.C. students for much of the field observation. RPA urges you to write EBRPD Board members to encourage them to continue funding the grasslands study.

In March, retired EBRPD Assistant General Manager Jerry Kent attended the RPA Board meeting. He talked about changes he sees at the District, about the upcoming EIR on the ridgeline fuel break, about a possible Habitat Management Plan, and about a newly formed group, *Friends of East Bay Regional Parks*.

Also at the March meeting were Judy Adler and Jeff Gustavson from Life Gardens. Their group works to restore trailside areas, currently focusing on the Iron Horse Trail in Contra Costa County. Check out their website www.LifeGarden.org or call 925-937-3044 for more information. Their newsletter is crammed with sustainable gardening information

And speaking of web sites, have you checked out RPA's site lately? RPA is extremely grateful to Alison Chaiken who kindly offered to post new information and documents for us. A click or two gets you the latest information at www.regionalparksassociation.org

But you do not have to be a board member nor doing a study nor be part of another group to attend the first-Monday-morning-of-the-month RPA Board meetings. We welcome anyone interested. We are currently guests of EBMUD in their Watershed Headquarters building on San Pablo Dam Road. (Thank you, EBMUD!)

EBRPD LAND USE PLANS ARE FLAWED

Coyote Hills Plan Is Best of the Bunch

The RPA Board has responded to three new Land Use Plan (LUP) proposals submitted by EBRPD. In January, RPA members received a copy of our submittal to EBRPD concerning Sibley Volcanic Preserve, expressing our deep distress over the proposed campground in a Preserve, (a different category than a regional park) its impacts on Caldecott Corridor wildlife, and EBRPD's planned grazing policies. Several other groups echoed our concerns, including the Bay Chapter Sierra Club, which submitted a scathing 27 page document. A hearing is not yet scheduled.

Next came the Sycamore Valley Open Space Preserve LUP. In response, RPA wrote: "(EBRPD proposes) 'maintaining the open grasslands (of Sycamore Valley Preserve) as working ranchland...' But there are no proposals to preserve pioneer customs, traditions, or technology. Instead, the land use plan simply proposes to allow modern, commercial cattle grazing to continue on this public land. It should be noted, however, that commercial cattle grazing does not really need to be preserved ...Such activity is already alive and well as a vigorous, ongoing industry in Alameda and Contra Costa counties." RPA continued: "Commercial livestock grazing as it is now practiced in Sycamore Valley Regional Preserve is inappropriate in this or any other officially designated natural preserve... Livestock grazing should be permitted only in order to achieve specific and limited natural landscape resource restoration goals... A more detailed, more creative, and more imaginative educational and interpretive plan should be developed for Sycamore Valley Regional Preserve." A tentative April 5 hearing date has been set for this LUP at the regular EBRPD Board meeting.

Just this week, RPA submitted comments on the Coyote Hills Regional Park LUP. Last summer RPA members visited that Park and its Ohlone Indian sites, and saw the problems of invasive cattails in the marshes.

We were pleased by some elements of this LUP because of the evident care and thought that reflect concern for this park. We applaud the special attention paid to restoring marshlands.

However we expressed concern about several instances where plant and animal management are at odds with values many believe are intrinsic to the park's purposes. For example, ground squirrels and pocket gophers are a vital component of the park ecosystem as prey species, and their burrows provide habitat for burrowing owls, gopher snakes, Western Fence lizards, and many insect species. But let these same animals invade a turf area such as planned for expanded picnic areas, and they are often poisoned; their carcasses enter the food chain with disastrous results. We suggest all plans for managing animals, insects or vegetation should be developed in consultation with Park naturalists, who are trained to look not just at esthetics but also at the whole ecosystem.

WHY DO WE CARE SO MUCH ABOUT THESE LUP'S? Those black spaces on map to left - all EBRPD lands - are an impressive, incredible asset to enjoy now, and are a marvelous legacy.
REJOICE, but strive to PROTECT!