



REGIONAL PARKS ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

November 2007

RPA Board Members

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CONCORD NAVAL WEAPONS STATION PLANS INCLUDE POSSIBILITY OF 80% OPEN SPACE

There was a major victory for the environmental community at the Concord City Council when the Council consented to include two more alternatives to its plan for the Concord Naval Weapons Station.

The environmental community had proposed a platform with 80% open space: 15% for community parks and 65% for regional park use.

To the consternation of some, the Council had accepted five alternative plans, none of which included more than 69% total open space.

But at its October 9 meeting, the Council agreed to include two more alternatives which include the environmentalist's choices.

East Bay Regional Park District, involved since the beginning, sent a letter in September 2007, proposing to partner with Concord, the National Park Service and community groups to create a great urban park with three areas of focus.

The first, Active/Passive recreation, would include sports fields, camping and picnic sites. The Outdoor Education/Interpretation category

would focus on the area's past, including its military history. Open Space/Habitat/Restoration would concentrate on conservation and restoration of natural resources, and accommodate activities such as hiking and nature viewing. Restoration of Mt. Diablo Creek is of high importance.

Early in 2008, the City of Concord will begin writing a draft EIR for review and adoption. The Navy will then begin an EIS in early 2009.

In all alternatives, major development is clustered near the North Concord BART station, including a state university campus, provision for the homeless, and affordable housing. The Weapons Station area covers 5,000 acres.

Check out the website: concordreuseproject.org. Attend a meeting, send a letter, support EBRPD.

LOOKING AHEAD TO FUTURE NEEDS

Vitaly important to EBRPD's expansion plans, an extension of Measure AA, the bond that provides EBRPD land acquisition funds, is being considered for the November 2008 ballot.

According to the *Contra Costa Times*, the district wants to develop seven new parks ----- including one nestled under the new Bay Bridge, and others at an old coal mining town site near Livermore, on grazing land near Hercules and in parts of the Concord Naval Weapons Station.

In a first step toward a major expansion of its natural park system, district administrators recommended adding the seven park areas and 12 trails to EBRPD's master plan map.

"This looks down the road for 20 or 30 years and tells people we're interested in establishing parks and trails," said Bob Doyle, assistant general manger for land acquisition. "It's a preliminary step, but it's a very big deal for us."

The district will consider the plan November 6 at the regular EBPD board meeting..

At the annual Stewardship Seminar, October 30,
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CURRENT GRASSLANDS STUDY FOR EBRPD PRESENTED AT RPA BOARD MEETING

For several years now we have been hearing from various East Bay Regional Park District people that the District's grasslands study was the answer to our concerns about the need to monitor and otherwise guard against the adverse impacts of livestock grazing in the regional parks. We were told that U. C. Professor James Bartolome and his team of researchers was studying the park district's grasslands, surveying plant and animal and bird life in selected plots of

grassland and discovering many interesting things, including the fact that livestock grazing actually increases biological diversity. We were (and still are) more than a little skeptical about that last claim.

To learn more about the District's ongoing grassland research program we met with Professor Bartolome and then with his colleague and partner in the project, Professor Reginald Barrett, But the study was then too new to be very meaningful. They both told us it would take time to accumulate enough data to be really helpful. So, we waited.

Finally, in October of this year, we met once again with Professor Bartolome. In fact, he was kind enough to be our special guest at one of our monthly board meetings. He showed the board a power point presentation about the grassland study and what has been learned so far. He was accompanied by three of his research assistants, a botanist, a zoologist, and an ornithologist. Nice people! Competent. Dedicated. Well spoken.

And we listened respectfully and carefully for two and a half hours. When we asked questions, we got very careful, very thoughtful answers. As a result, we now we believe we know what the district's grasslands study is about and what it is not about.

It is about good careful sampling and surveying of plants, animals, and birds in selected plots of grassland in several of our regional parks.

It is NOT about livestock grazing practices and policy either in the district as a whole or even in any one park or group of parks. Whether it will even have any impact on the district's grazing practices and policies is unclear.

The study will undoubtedly produce some interesting data about plants, animals and birds in selected plots of grassland in the parks.

The study will NOT automatically produce any changes in the district's livestock grazing practices and policies. Only the district can make those changes—some of which are very clearly and very badly needed.

Luckily, David Amme, the District's Wildlands Management Program supervisor, shares RPA's point of view about the need for more and better management of livestock grazing in the parks. He is currently working on a comprehensive grazing management plan for Briones Regional Park that will improve livestock management in that area. Implementation of the plan will begin in the 2007-2008 grazing season.

We look forward to working with him on his proposed grazing improvements in Briones and to helping open up a whole new era of more thoughtful adaptive management of the livestock grazing issue in our regional parks.

A LOOK AT EBMUD'S GRAZING POLICIES

On October 5, two RPA board members met with Rod Tripp, Ranger Supervisor, EBMUD for an enjoyable and informative session regarding livestock grazing and its methods and uses in their East Bay watershed lands.

Obviously the overarching concern of EBMUD is water quality in its reservoirs. A primary reason for their using cattle in vegetation management is to reduce the risk of dissolved organic carbon that might enter the water system. As Tripp explained it, dissolved organic carbon occurs when water stands on dried grasses, creating a type of mold. This then causes a chemical reaction when the tainted water reacts with

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EBMUD continued...

chlorine in the treatment process and produces methanes - big trouble in a municipal water supply.

EBMUD's grazing policies differ from EBRPD's in several ways. First of all, an overall grazing plan is in place for the entire watershed, with the stated objective of maintaining minimum vegetative cover of 65-75% and residual dry matter of 900 pounds on gentle slopes and up to 1400 pounds on steep slopes. To achieve this objective, each grazing allotment must be treated differently in terms of animal numbers and times of the year when grazing is allowed.

One of the most interesting points Tripp made was that EBMUD offers incentives to leaseholders in the form of reduced grazing fees if EBMUD's field staff, in their monitoring, find increasing presence of native and/or endangered species on the individual plots. EBMUD also plants oaks as a mitigating factor when appropriate.

To help accomplish the stated goals of increasing plant diversity and native and/or endangered species, each allotment has been inventoried and a baseline established. No

specific mention was made of invertebrate or vertebrate diversity, but monitoring for red-legged frogs has been going on for many years, and it has been established that cattle are actually useful in reducing vegetation around the ponds so that the frogs can then enter and breed. Half open water and half vegetation around the pond allows the frogs to breed and still provides habitat for migrating birds. EBRPD has come to the same conclusion.

LOOKING AHEAD Continued

GM Pat O'Brien opined that, by the end of the next 30 years, most every decision will have been made about East Bay lands: they will either be protected or developed. Check out Parks, Trails and Services for the 21st Century on Ebarks.org for an interesting look at what the district has in mind for the coming decade. The Draft Master map shows areas of consideration for new parks and trails, and mentions the Master Plan update in 2009.

KEELEY TO SPEAK ON FIRE HAZARD REDUCTION AT CCC ANNUAL MEETING

The public is invited to hear Jon E. Keeley, one of the nation's leading experts on wildfire and natural landscape management, speak on "Balancing Fire Hazard Reduction and Resource Protection in California's Fire-Prone Ecosystems" at the Claremont Canyon Conservancy's annual meeting Sunday, November 18, at the Claremont Hotel in Berkeley.

Keeley is a research ecologist with the U. S. Geological Survey's Western Ecological Research, and an adjunct professor with the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at U.C.L.A. His research has focused on the

ecological impacts of wildfire and other aspects of plant physiology and plant ecology, as well as on rare plants and habitats.

RPA members will remember Dr. Keeley's highly informative presentation to RPA in March 2003. That presentation, entitled "Fire and the Wildland-Urban Interface: Lessons from the 2003 Fire Season." led to a ground-breaking article entitled "Fire History of the San Francisco East Bay Region and Implications for Landscape Patterns," which was published in 2005 in the *International Journal of Wildland Fire*.

Dr Keeley is an excellent speaker who has had the courage to take controversial stands on various events and policies, provided reliable data are available to justify his conclusions.

The annual meeting of the CCC is free-of-charge to the public, November 18 from 4 to 6 pm. RSVP: ClaremontCanyon@hotmail.com or telephone 510-843-2226.

On October 11, at Golden Gate Audubon's 90th birthday celebration, RPA president Amelia Wilson and Save Open Space – Gateway Valley were awarded the Elsie Roemer Conservation Award, given to "volunteers who have shown lasting and consistent dedication to environmental conservation." Also given the Roemer award was Whitney Dodson, who founded the North Richmond Shoreline Open Space Alliance and is largely responsible for saving Breuner Marsh. Congratulations to both!

