10 PRESERVATION – PURPORTED MISSION OF EBRPD

Over the history of the EBRPD numerous documents have been created by and for the District to summarize its purpose and mission. When major vision documents are created the public is often included to help define the vision. The EBRPD has proven that it has the ability to identify and summarize succinctly what its role and purpose should be in the context of its principal role as steward and preserver of the open space in the East Bay. But what the District has shown, time and again, is that it does not have the ability to realize the vision that it has put into these major visionary documents. The District simply represents what it knows is prudent and appealing to the public ear yet its actions represent something very different when it comes to preserving the land for which it has been appointed steward. The GRTF Review process and subsequent unanimous approval of the task force’s recommendations by the EBRPD General Manager and Board of Directors further demonstrates that:

The current board of directors and upper management are not qualified to have sole decision authority on how to manage the wildlands on behalf of the public.

This will become more apparent to the reader as the remainder of the report is presented. Within the EBRPD there are a handful of individuals who are the sole decision-makers with regard to how the 85,000+ acres of park lands will be managed. When these few individuals make key decisions regarding the use of these lands, the current board and general manager simply rubber-stamp those recommendations and decisions without question. The result is that these lands are not being managed for the public’s benefit, rather they are being managed for the benefit of outside private interests, namely, the cattle-ranching industry. This statement is not just conjecture on the author’s part. This fact will also become clear to the reader as the views and the precedence of park use priorities being established by the District’s directors and upper management.

The most recent vision document produced by EBRPD in conjunction with the public is the Master Plan 1997. In the author’s opinion, this plan was very well written and well thought out. The plan is a coordinated effort by District Board members and staff in conjunction with public input. The plan defines quite explicitly the vision and the mission of the EBRPD and sets priorities for 1997-2007. The District is nearly halfway through this planning period and little has been accomplished with respect to the goals for preservation or restoration of the wildlands of the East Bay open space. The EBRPD website also provides supplementary information on EBRPD objectives. The remainder of this section discusses the Master Plan 1997 highlights in the context of preserving park resources and the intended environmental ethic of the EBRPD.

NOTE: In the following paragraphs for the remainder of this section, statements will be highlighted for emphasis and clarity. Those in blue identify commitments that are either dictated by state law or those that the public and the EBRPD have mutually agreed are actions the District will take. The statements in red are activities or actions that District purports to be doing but is not.
The EBRPD's Primary Function and Vision

The following excerpt from the Master Plan 1997 states that public service (not public ranching) is its primary function:

*Public service is the District's primary function. To this end, the Master Plan provides policies and guidelines for achieving the highest standards of service in resource conservation, management, interpretation, public access, and recreation. These policies seek to guide the stewardship and development of the parks in such a way as to maintain a careful balance between the need to protect and conserve resources and the recreational use of parklands for all to enjoy now and in the future.* [Master Plan 1997]

Therefore the needs of the public and their enjoyment of the parks should be the first priority of the EBRPD. There is nothing in this statement that supports the District’s position that it should be *maintaining a healthy agricultural economy* (quote by Director Lane during GRTF review May 23, 2000) or furthering the specific needs of the ranching community. Mr. Mikkelson, the assistant general manager responsible for the District grazing program, informed the author that he should use another park during the wet winter season if the park conditions caused by cattle-grazing at SVOS-N were not acceptable. Such an upside-down perspective is indicative of the lack of public concern that exists in the minds of the current board of directors and upper management of the District.

The next most important consideration for the District should be its vision for the future, which directly dictates where its policy decisions should be directed. The following vision statement was extracted from the Master Plan 1997 and was formulated by those whose ideals were the founding vision for the EBRPD over 70 years ago:

*"The need is a vital one...The charm of the region as a place in which to live will depend largely upon natural conditions that are destined to disappear unless properly protected for the public in general."* (Report on Proposed Park Reservations for East Bay Cities, Olmsted Brothers and Ansel F. Hall, December, 1930)

*This founding vision will continue to be an inspiration for the East Bay Regional Park District as an enduring statement of its social and environmental responsibilities. With this Master Plan, the Board of Directors re-dedicates the East Bay Regional Park District to the conservation of open space resources and the provision of outdoor recreational opportunities for present and future generations.* [Master Plan 1997]

The Master Plan 1997 further states:

*The following vision statement will guide the District:*

*The East Bay Regional Parks will preserve a priceless heritage of natural and cultural resources, open space, parks, and trails for the future and will set aside park areas for enjoyment and healthful recreation for generations to come. An environmental ethic guides us in all that we do.* [Master Plan 1997]

Their stated purpose and vision are clear. However, the EBRPD has failed to realize this vision through the actions of its board and upper level management. The District has consistently shown that it knows what the public wants to hear. The District has also
consistently shown that they know how to circumvent such public commitments with methods and actions that are intentionally misrepresented so as to give the semblance that they are fulfilling such commitments. The level of integrity and honesty with the public will be illustrated in numerous sections of this report.

The prevalence of such attitudes by District management is making it extremely difficult for the public to get the District to respond to important issues such as resource preservation and restoration. The land has been under siege by private ranching interests for too many years and is severely degraded as a result. It appears that the only avenues left to effect meaningful changes with regard to preservation of natural resources are through legal means and state congressional action.

**The EBRPD’s Mission**

The following excerpt from the Master Plan 1997 summarizes some of the key mission elements that relate to the preservation of natural resources:

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MISSION
The East Bay Regional Park District will achieve its vision in the following ways:

- Provide a diversified system of regional parklands, trails, and parkland-related services that will offer outstanding opportunities for creative use of outdoor time.
- Acquire and preserve significant biologic, geologic, scenic, and historic resources within Alameda and Contra Costa Counties.
- Manage, maintain, and restore the parklands so that they retain their important scenic, natural, and cultural values.
- Interpret the parklands by focusing educational programs on the visitor's relationship to nature, natural processes, ecology, the value of natural conditions, and the history of the parklands.
- Provide recreational development that fosters appropriate use of parklands while preserving their remoteness and intrinsic value.
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All of these mission elements stress the importance of preservation and the value of natural conditions. It does not mean preserving cattle grazing operations that existed on acquired lands prior to their acquisition! While these mission statements are what one would expect from an agency that proclaims that “an environmental ethic guides us in all we do”, what one experiences in parks that are grazed is something far from what can be considered natural or preserved. The District makes these mission statements to appease the public and then behind the gates of its parks it operates a cattle ranching operation under the pretext of land and wilderness preservation.

The author speculates that at least 99% of the public never goes behind the park gates, deep into the parks to witness what is really happening on the trails and hillsides, hence the lack of public outrage.

**The Protection of Natural Resources in EBRPD Parks**

The primary issue with cattle-grazing is that it represents a gross lack of natural resource management, protection and preservation. The following excerpts shown below are from
the Master Plan 1997 summarizing the public commitments made by the EBRPD to manage and protect natural resources on the public lands that constitute its parks:

**RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

The various natural and cultural resources of the East Bay Regional Park District...are all a public treasure. The 85,000 acres of mostly undeveloped, natural, open space parklands in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties offer a variety of grassland, shrubland, woodland, forest, lake, shoreline, riparian and wetland environments, which provide essential habitat for a diverse collection of wild plants and animals.

Most park "wildlands" (or natural areas) are managed to allow natural ecological processes to take place. Any comprehensive program to conserve biological resources must incorporate the concept of biodiversity, which calls for management that promotes variability within and among living organisms in an ecosystem. The District will continue to integrate the principles of biodiversity conservation into the management of its resources to maintain stable and functioning biological communities. This philosophy will help sustain healthy and balanced parkland environments for the education, enjoyment, and well-being of present and future generations.

**WILDLAND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

The goal of the District's wildland management program is to conserve and enhance important resource values such as soil, vegetation, wildlife, and water to ensure that natural parkland ecosystems are maintained in a healthy and productive condition.

The District has additional legal responsibilities to protect state and federally listed rare, threatened, and endangered plant and animal species found in the regional parks, as well as a responsibility to its neighbors and downstream property owners to conduct sound and sensible management practices.

The District will maintain, manage, conserve, enhance, and restore park wildland resources to protect essential plant and animal habitat within viable, sustainable ecosystems.

[Master Plan 1997]

This report will clearly demonstrate that natural resources are in fact not being protected. What is very clear is that natural resources on all acquired parklands are gradually being destroyed (if not already so from cattle grazing operations prior to acquisition) from their time of acquisition and gradually replaced by nothing more than barren lands whose sole purpose is to maximize the production of forage grasses (and weeds) for cattle production.

The *Encarta Encyclopedia* states the following about biodiversity:

> Unfortunately, human activities have greatly reduced biodiversity around the world. The 20th century encompasses one of the greatest waves of extinction, or elimination of species, to occur on the planet. The greatest threat to biodiversity is loss of habitat as humans develop land for agriculture, grazing livestock, industry, and habitation.

The *Environmental Defense Fund* report *Defending the Desert* [Cooperrider, Wilcove et al., 1995] gives the following definition of biodiversity:
Biodiversity is the aggregate of native species assemblages (communities), individual (native) species, and genetic variation within such species and the processes by which these components interact within and among themselves.

This report further states:

Life is dynamic. Species are constantly changing in response to new conditions. Over long periods of time, changing conditions result in selection for new mixtures of genes and eventually can lead to speciation. Similarly, biotic communities are constantly shifting in distribution and relative abundance in response to new climactic and geological conditions. Fires and floods are normal and recurring events to which living organisms are constantly responding. Preserving a static world is neither feasible nor desirable. But conserving the natural processes and the means by which life responds to such processes is not only desirable but necessary if biodiversity is truly to be conserved.

Livestock grazing does not preserve biodiversity as it is continually interfering with and destroying many natural processes on public wildlands. The remainder of this section takes a look at various aspects of management of natural resources by the EBRPD.

**Wildlands Management Methods of EBRPD**

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of EBRPD wildlands management policies is the palpable lack of concern for the wildlife on parklands. This is perhaps the biggest crime with respect to the District’s present grazing policy. As developers continue to build houses the open space in the Bay Area is being consumed at an alarming rate. The open space that was once “home” for many types of wildlife is rapidly dwindling. The apparent, though intentional, lack of awareness on the part of the EBRPD is astounding as these public land stewards irresponsibly manage the remaining open space. They destroy the habitat for all wildlife except for those that live in the mature oak trees (vegetation too tall for a cow to reach) or those that live far enough below the ground to escape the wrath of a submerged cow hoof (this requires living at least 18” below the ground surface to be safe). All for the sole purpose of subsidizing a private ranching business under the guise of natural resource preservation.

The following excerpts from the Master Plan 1997 indicate that the EBRPD knows about the importance of ecosystems, but apparently the protection of such is not a priority at all.

**WILDLAND MANAGEMENT METHODS**

The wildlands of the East Bay are a dynamic system developed over millennia through complex physical and biological processes, under such influences as fire and grazing animals. Fire is a primal force that plays an important role in the natural cycle of ecological succession, and many plants and animals have adapted to and depend upon recurring fire. Likewise, the native flora of the region evolved in association with grazing by large herds of prehistoric herbivores, long since extinct, and once abundant populations of elk and deer. The wildland flora we see today is a mixture of native vegetation and introduced, non-native annual grasses and herbs. Most wildlife species are native, with the exception of several species of
introduced, non-native, and feral animals. Wildland fires, which once burned unimpeded over wide areas, are largely suppressed today to protect life and property.

Research has demonstrated that active management which simulates the natural influences of fire and grazing animals can be an important factor in maintaining balanced and diverse ecosystems. Controlled livestock grazing and prescribed burning programs can be used to achieve these results. Other resource management methods, such as using machinery to crush, uproot, and mow, disk, or cut down vegetation, are useful in managing wildland resources on a small scale.

[Master Plan 1997]

Contrary to the first sentence of the paragraph above, there is no evidence in scientific literature that supports the statement that livestock grazing is an important factor in maintaining balanced and diverse ecosystems. Secondly, controlled grazing is not considered an acceptable term according to the Forage & Grazing Terminology Committee [Terminology for Grazing Lands & Grazing Animals – Forage & Grazing Terminology Committee; 1991].

According to the reference cited,

‘Controlled grazing’ has sometimes been used erroneously to describe increased grazing management. The ‘control’ imposed is a matter of level or degree and is better described in terms of grazing management and grazing methods.

It is also interesting to note the position frequently taken that livestock grazing is the only acceptable resource management method for use by the EBRPD.

The District will conserve, enhance, and restore biological resources to promote naturally functioning ecosystems. Conservation efforts may involve using controlled grazing, in accordance with Wildland Management Policies and Guidelines, prescribed burning, mechanical treatments, integrated pest management, and/or habitat protection and restoration. Restoration activities may involve the removal of invasive plants and animals or the reintroduction of native or naturalized species adapted to or representative of a given site.

The District will manage park wildlands using modern resource management practices based on scientific principles supported by available research. New scientific information will be incorporated into the planning and implementation of District wild-land management programs as it becomes available. The District will coordinate with other agencies and organizations in a concerted effort to inventory, evaluate, and manage natural resources and to maintain and enhance the biodiversity of the region.

[Master Plan 1997]

The EBRPD has time and again chosen to avoid practices based upon true scientific principles. The reason being that if they did, they would be forced to severely curtail or eliminate the grazing program all together. One theme that is consistent throughout the Master Plan 1997 is that the EBRPD will “manage natural resources and maintain and enhance the biodiversity of the region”. What is lacking is any
evidence that the board of directors, general manager and upper management support the realization of this goal in the parks.

**KEY ELEMENTS OF THE PLANNING PROCESS**

*The District's planning efforts involve a core commitment to public participation and informed review; compliance with applicable laws; analysis of natural resources and assessment of public use objectives; protection of open space; and on-going liaison with other jurisdictions.* [Master Plan 1997]

The EBRPD is failing miserably in this respect. Each item in red in this last paragraph is not being done. The lack of informed review is clearly demonstrated in the GRTF process. The process was completed without consultation or presentation from any outside experts as the General Manager requested. Unfortunately the General Manager made no attempt to correct this gross oversight and, along with the board of directors, unanimously approved the GRTF findings and changes to grazing policy. The fact that the board and the general manager are not astute enough to catch this grave oversight is revealing and the primary reason the author strongly suggests that all of these individuals should be replaced by responsible people who can carry out the vision of those that founded the EBRPD. The author would like to add that he stressed that outside experts should be included in the process and that a panel of experts should debate the issues before the public as part of the GRTF process. Members of the GRTF agreed that this would be desirable but then senior management, who were not members of the GRTF, manipulated the entire process and conveniently failed to include it in the agenda.

**ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE**

*The District follows policies and procedures that comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The District evaluates the environmental impact of planned projects and prepares the appropriate CEQA documentation for Board approval. In the case of parklands located adjacent to lands owned by other jurisdictions, the District fully considers the comments of these neighboring agencies in the plan preparation process. The District also complies with applicable laws and permit requirements.* [Master Plan 1997]

The statements relating to CEQA compliance are simply untrue when it comes to livestock grazing matters. The District went to court in 1999 to fight a lawsuit which would have forced them to prepare environmental impact reports relating to its grazing program. This action speaks volumes about the District’s willingness to responsibly comply with state and federal environmental reporting standards with regard to its grazing program.

**Riparian and Wetlands Management**

It is a widely known fact that riparian and wetland areas are the most vulnerable to damage by cattle. This fact is frequently demonstrated in any EBRPD park that is
grazed by cattle. The District does have an awareness of this problem yet it rarely acts sufficiently to abate the impacts of cattle grazing in these areas.

Another disturbing aspect of grazing in wetland areas is the fact that cattle frequently urinate and defecate into streams that are used by wildlife and ultimately feed public water sources. This not only occurs in the EBRPD parks but the author has seen numerous instances of such activities on San Francisco Water District (SFWD) lands near the Calaveras Reservoir adjacent to the Sunol Regional Wilderness. In this area every effort is made to prevent humans from getting near this reservoir, assumedly to protect the purity of the watershed. Yet the SFWD lets cattle urinate and defecate into streams that feed this public water source. Recently in the midwest humans were killed by exposure to cryptosporidium as a result of water source contamination from cattle urination and defecation. These negative effects of water contamination also impact the wildlife that rely on these natural water sources.

The following excerpts from the Master Plan 1997 address water resources and riparian and wetland resources:

**WATER MANAGEMENT**

**Water Resources** -- District water resources are comprised of both surface and ground water. Surface waters include streams, lakes, ponds, and portions of the San Francisco Bay estuary. Groundwater consists of springs and wells that originate from water stored in underground aquifers. The potential beneficial uses of a water source are determined by water quality and quantity characteristics. Beneficial uses of water on District lands include recreation (fishing, swimming, boating), wildlife and fisheries habitat, livestock watering, drinking water, irrigation, and domestic use. The District monitors water quality to comply with water quality standards intended to protect public health.

Park water resources will be used for beneficial purposes. Water quality will be monitored to comply with established standards. The District will participate in cooperative efforts to plan comprehensive watershed management, and will adopt "best management practice" guidelines for District land use activities to minimize potential storm water pollution. The District will monitor land use planning and development activities by other agencies and cities to avoid potential adverse impacts to park land from pollutants generated by offsite or upstream sources.

**Riparian and Wetland Resources** -- Riparian and wetland areas are transitional lands between terrestrial and aquatic systems, where the water table is usually at near the surface or the land is covered by shallow water at least part of the year. Such areas include swamps, freshwater, brackish water and saltwater marshes, bogs, vernal pools, periodically inundated saltflats, intertidal mudflats, wet meadows, wet pastures, springs and seeps, portions of lakes, ponds, rivers, streams, riparian corridors and their buffer zones, and all other areas which seasonally or permanently exhibit at least one of the attributes described above. These water sources improve the value of the surrounding area as habitat for wildlife, and are themselves an essential habitat element for plants and animals that require free water or a wetland environment for all or part of their life stages. Wetland resource areas include wetlands, associated plant and animal species, and, to a reasonable extent, the watershed or rights to water sources, the home range of wetland community members, ecological transition zones, and buffer zones adequate to prevent loss of wetland resources by human activity.
The District will manage riparian and other wetland environments and their buffer zones to preserve and enhance the natural and beneficial values of these important resources and to prevent the destruction, loss, or degradation of habitat. The District will participate in the preservation, restoration, and management of riparian and wetland areas of regional significance, and will not initiate any action that could result in a net decrease in park wetlands. The District will encourage public access to the Bay/Delta shoreline, but will control access to riparian and wetland areas, when necessary, to protect natural resources.

[Master Plan 1997]

The negative influence of livestock on stream and riparian ecosystems is well documented in Survey of Livestock Influences on Stream & Riparian Ecosystems in the Western US [Belsky, Matzke & Uselman 1999]. This report finds that livestock grazing and trampling on aquatic and riparian species and habitats affects:

- water quality
- stream channel morphology
- hydrology (stream flow patterns)
- riparian zone soils
- instream vegetation
- streambank vegetation
- aquatic and riparian wildlife

Most recent scientific studies document that livestock grazing continues to be detrimental to stream and riparian ecosystems.

This report will clearly demonstrate with specific examples that riparian and wetland habitat is not being protected nor preserved in EBRPD parks. It will also show examples of how cattle are polluting the streams and destroying water sources that are very important to wild animals and the surrounding plant life.

**Vegetation Management**

The District’s policies in this regard are not guided by objective scientific principles and Master Plan 1997 objectives, rather they are simply guided by business tenets for optimal cattle production and by the subjective whims of a handful of EBRPD managers.

**VEGETATION MANAGEMENT**

The regional park wildlands reflect the plant communities of the Bay Area; they contain a diverse mixture of native and non-native trees, shrubs, and annual and perennial herbaceous plants. Although the flora has changed considerably as a result of non-native plant introductions and increased urbanization, numerous native plants remain. Land use and vegetation changes over the past two centuries have irreversibly altered the landscape, making it necessary to use management techniques to maintain an ecological balance between native and non-native vegetation and to achieve wildland fire safety objectives.

All District vegetation management activities are designed to maintain plant community dynamics. The District manages most plant communities to preserve their intrinsic value as naturally functioning ecosystems.
The District will maintain and manage vegetation to conserve, enhance, and restore natural plant communities; to preserve and protect populations of rare, threatened, endangered, and sensitive plant species and their habitats; and, where possible, to protect biodiversity and to achieve a high representation of native plants and animals.

The District will minimize the widespread encroachment of monotypic stands of coyote brush, poison oak, and broom on park land. The District will manage agricultural sites and cultivated areas in accordance with appropriate agricultural and landscaping practices and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) methods; control noxious weed infestations, broom, and other invasive, non-native shrubs; and eventually replace these invasive plants with desirable native species.

[Master Plan 1997]

This report will clearly demonstrate that the only vegetation that is preserved or restored in EBRPD parks that are grazed by livestock are forage grasses. All other vegetation is classified as a nuisance of some sort and therefore is duly decimated by the District’s cattle grazing program, regardless of its importance to the ecological cycle.

**Soils Management**

The encyclopedia defines the primary components of soil as:

1. undissolved inorganic or nonliving components produced by the weathering and breakdown of surface rocks;
2. soluble nutrients used by plants;
3. various forms of organic matter, both living and dead; and
4. gases and water required by plants and subterranean organisms.

The organic fraction of soil is composed of undecayed plant and animal debris, together with variable amounts of an amorphous organic material called humus. Humus is not a stable mixture of chemicals but, rather, a dynamic, constantly changing mixture representing every stage in the decay of dead organic matter from the simplest to the most complex. The decay process is caused by the action of large numbers of microscopic bacteria and fungi. These microorganisms, in the course of feeding, attack and digest the complex organic compounds that make up living matter and reduce them to simpler compounds that plants can use for food.

This organic fraction makes up 2 to 5 percent of the surface soil for many soils in humid regions, but may be less than 0.5 percent in arid soils or more than 95 percent in peat soils.

The Encarta Encyclopedia ("Soil," Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2001; [http://encarta.msn.com](http://encarta.msn.com) © 1997-2001 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved) further states the following about Soils Conservation and the impacts of human activities:
Globally, agriculture accounts for 28 percent of the nearly 2 billion hectares (5 billion acres) of soil that have been degraded by human activities; **overgrazing is responsible for 34 percent**; and deforestation is responsible for 29 percent.

The physical nature of the soil is determined by the proportions of particles of various sizes. Inorganic particles in soil range in size from fairly large pieces of stone and gravel to extremely small particles less than 1/40,000 cm (less than 1/100,000 in) in breadth. Large soil particles, such as sand and gravel, are mostly inactive chemically, but small inorganic particles, the chief components of fine clays, serve also as a reservoir from which nutrients are drawn by plant roots. The size and nature of these tiny inorganic particles also largely determine the ability of a given soil to store water, which is vital to all plant growth processes.
This delicate surface layer of the soil, which contains microscopic particles and takes many years to establish, is seriously degraded by the constant trampling of livestock. The following excerpt from Master Plan 1997 discusses soils but interestingly makes no reference whatsoever to the impacts that cattle might have on the amorphous organic layer of the soil.

**GEOLOGY, SOILS, AND PALEONTOLOGY**

*Soil* - the part of the earth's crust that has been transformed as a result of decomposition, weathering, and organic decay processes is a basic natural resource that plays a critical role in supporting life. Preventing soil loss due to landslides and wind and water erosion is an important resource management consideration on park land. A certain amount of natural erosion occurs due to steep slopes, immature soils, flooding, wildfire, and/or unstable geologic conditions. Other evidence of erosion can be attributed to past and current land use practices and other human activities. The most successful long-term approach to controlling soil erosion is to maintain vegetative cover and vegetation residue, as this approach forms a barrier to erosion and impedes the overland flow of water by increasing infiltration and inhibiting runoff.

*The District will identify existing and potential erosion problems and take corrective measures to repair damage and mitigate causal effects. The District will manage the parks to assure that an adequate cover of vegetation remains on the ground to provide soil protection. Where vegetative cover has been reduced or eliminated, the District will take steps to restore it, using native or naturalized plants adapted to the site. The District will minimize soil disturbance associated with construction and maintenance operations and avoid disruptive activities in areas with unstable soils, whenever possible. The District will arrest the progress of active gully erosion, where practical, and take action to restore these areas to stable conditions. The District will notify adjacent property owners of potential landslide situations on District lands to warn of potential risks and conform with applicable law, and will protect important geological and paleontological features from vandalism and misuse.*

*[Master Plan 1997]*

All of the “wills” highlighted in blue in the previous section are not being mitigated in the parks that are being grazed by livestock. Cattle are instrumental in creating the conditions that initiate erosion. One only needs to walk along park trails and observe the places where cattle enter and leave the trails at will. These areas gradually become places where trail fallout occurs. This type of damage is not limited to the areas adjacent to trails, these are just convenient places to view erosion. There are numerous places on park hillsides where cattle are causing erosion and soil damage that the District simply fails to adequately monitor.

Studies of livestock grazing on stream and riparian zone soils has identified the following negative effects (*Belsky, Matzke & Uselman 1999)*:

- *Vegetation consumed and trampled by livestock increases the amount of bare ground which results in higher erosion and sediment delivery to streams.*
- *Soil compaction, removal of vegetative cover and trampling causes erosion which results in loss of fertile topsoils, suffocation of fish eggs, loss of pools and pool volume and reduction of reservoir capacity.*
Removal of aboveground biomass by livestock decreases the litter layer resulting in lower filtration rates, greater runoff and erosion, reduced soil organic matter and warmer, drier soils.

The California Native Plant Society, a statewide non-profit organization of amateurs and professionals with a common interest in California’s native plants has published numerous papers on various aspects of livestock grazing. One such paper was Impacts of Livestock Grazing on Soils & Recommendations for Management (11/20/96 Roberson, PhD, Senior Land Management Analyst). The following excerpts on soils are from this paper.

**IMPARTS OF GRAZING ON SOILS**

Livestock grazing profoundly affects soils, as it affects other components of ecosystems. The impacts of livestock on soils have been studied throughout the West since the turn of the century. Livestock have been found to significantly alter almost every aspect of soil structure and function, including soil porosity, chemistry, microbiology, nutrient cycles, productivity, and erosion rates. Most studies have shown that livestock grazing increases soil compaction, erosion, and short-term nutrient availability, while it tends to reduce long-term soil nutrient and organic matter levels.

Soil structure controls the movement of air, water, roots and soil organisms into and through the soil. Structure is also the soil attribute most immediately affected by grazing. Grazing changes soil structure primarily by compaction. Compaction reduces water and air infiltration into the soil and restricts plant root growth both physically, by reducing the space available for root exploration (Tisdale et al., 1985), and biologically.

Studies have shown that low oxygen availability associated with soil compaction inhibits oak root growth, makes oaks more vulnerable to attack by fungal and other pathogens, and reduces oak survival (Costello et al., 1991). Similar responses have been observed for many other plant species in compacted soils (Tisdale et al., 1985). Finally, more water runs off and less water is absorbed when soils are compacted. This reduces water availability to plants throughout the growing season.

Cattle weigh 500 kg (1,100 lbs.) or more (Holecheck et al., 1995). The pressure on soil from moving cattle has been estimated by various researchers at between 1.7 and 4.2 kg/cm² (23.9-59.05 lb/in²). By contrast a 68 kg (159lb) human exerts a static pressure of 0.4 kg/cm² (6.2 lb/in²) (Abdel-Magid et al., 1987b; Ratliff, 1985). This intense and continual pressure from moving livestock easily compacts soil, particularly when the soil is wet and most vulnerable to compaction (Brady, 1984; Warren, 1987).

**Erosion**

Surface soil erosion has profound effects on soil productivity and ecosystem function. Nutrients, organic matter, microorganisms, soil fauna, and roots are all concentrated in the surface soil or soil A-horizon (Brady, 1984).
mismanagement, an A-horizon that took thousands of years to develop can be lost in a few years or decades. With loss of the A-horizon, soils lose most of their productivity because they lose the nutrients, organic matter and associated water holding capacity that were concentrated there (Batie, 1984).

**Bare soil**

One site characteristic that is often used as an indicator of compaction and accelerated surface erosion, as well as ecological condition generally, is the amount of bare soil present on the site (Pluhar et al., 1987; Warren et al., 1986c; Menke et al., 1996; National Research Council, 1994). Vegetation protects the soil surface from the erosive forces of trampling, raindrop impact, overland flow, and wind. Vegetation and litter also buffer the soil from compaction. This is why the National Research Council (1994) has recommended that grazed areas cannot be classified as healthy if bare ground is apparent.

Several studies have found that the percentage of bare ground on a site increases with grazing, particularly at higher stocking densities (Schuiz and Leninger, 1990; Warren et al., 1986c). One study (Naeth et al., 1991) found increases of between 270% and 470% bare ground in a grazed area compared to an ungrazed exclosure.

**Riparian and meadow soils**

Riparian and wetland soils are unique and very important components of California ecosystems. Riparian soils and vegetation provide irreplaceable habitat for aquatic plants and animals (Kauffman and Krueger, 1984; Naiman et al., 1993). Healthy riparian soils and vegetation also play important roles in maintaining water quality because both below and above-ground vegetation act as filters for sediment and biological pollutants such as nutrients and microorganisms (Kauffman and Krueger, 1984; Kleinfelder, 1992; Clary et al., 1996).

Riparian areas, wetlands, and meadows are heavily impacted by livestock grazing. Livestock, like wildlife, are attracted by water and by the shade provided by riparian vegetation. Because of the intense livestock use of riparian areas, meadows and wetlands, these areas absorb a disproportionate share of grazing damage, often with undesirable consequences. Both woody and herbaceous riparian vegetation is often overused by livestock. Trampling of stream banks damages root systems, weakens plant communities, and adds sediment to streams and other waters. As riparian soils and vegetation are damaged by grazing, their ability to trap sediment and build riparian soils is decreased. Throughout California and the west, grazing-related gullying and stream downcutting have cut through organic soils that were laid down over centuries in meadows and wetlands. All of these impacts compromise the ability of the riparian areas to produce clean water and to provide habitat for native vegetation, fish and wildlife (Kauffman and Krueger, 1984; Fleishner, 1995; Ohmart, 1996; General Accounting Office, 1988)
Soil fertility and nutrient cycles

Grazing profoundly affects both soil fertility and soil chemistry. Grazing animals, through herbivory, digestion, and excretion, dramatically increase the decomposition rate and directly alter the amounts of nutrients stored in the soil, the spatial distribution of those nutrients, and the availability of those nutrients to plants. Grazing indirectly affects soil nutrients through its effects of plant species composition and soil structure. There is little disagreement among researchers that grazing significantly changes soil nutrient status (Pieper, 1994; Laurenroth et al., 1994) and that livestock remove many nutrients from the soil and ecosystem.

The indicators of soil health that appear to be most useful include:

Erosion indicators:
- Presence of rills, gullies and pedestals
- % cover by bare soil

Compaction indicators
- comparison of infiltration rates between grazed and ungrazed reference areas
- comparison of soil bulk density between grazed and ungrazed areas
- comparison of rooting depth between grazed and ungrazed areas

Indicators of soil nutrient status
- comparison of available nutrients, particularly nitrogen, between grazed and ungrazed areas
- comparison of soil litter and organic matter levels between grazed and ungrazed areas

Indicators of riparian soil integrity
- % cover by native, hydrophilic, bank armoring vegetation, such as Carex nebracensis and Salixsp., on stream banks. This should be compared with ungrazed reference sites.
- % cover by bare soil on stream banks
- % cover by livestock trampling damage on stream banks
- height of vegetation on stream banks at the end of the grazing season
- presence of gullies
- comparison of percentage of overhanging banks between grazed and ungrazed areas
- depth to water table

The District does not specify any of these indicators in its WMP&G document. The document is lacking in specificity regarding all aspects of quantifiable measurements that should be used to apply and assess meaningful grazing management techniques.
An Assault On Biodiversity
In The Name Of Wildlands & Habitat Preservation
Friends of Sycamore Valley
February 25, 2002

Wildlife Management

There is an obvious lack of concern for the wildlife in District parks that are grazed by livestock. For example, at SVOS-N the District allowed cattle to trample and nearly destroy the riparian habitat of a threatened species for an entire grazing season. For nearly six months during this time the author sent numerous letters with very descriptive pictures to all board members and not one of them ever responded to or acknowledged the identified concerns. They all simply sat mum until the CBD threatened a law suit for take (i.e. the action of killing, capturing, or catching) of the California red-legged frog.

There truly is virtually no wildlife management in EBRPD parks. One only needs to search the District’s files for data on wildlife programs to illustrate to real lack of concern for wildlife in the parks. The District’s concept of wildlife is to have the parks populated by hundreds of domesticated livestock. The problem with this perspective is that the livestock consume all of the vegetation that makes up the “real” wildlife habitat and food sources. The wildlife rapidly see this situation for what it is and migrate elsewhere. This is extremely unfortunate and not at all in line with the vision of Master Plan 1997.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

Terrestrial Wildlife -- The abundant and diverse assortment of birds, mammals, reptiles, and invertebrates that dwell in the regional parks is an integral part of the ecology of the San Francisco Bay Area and an aesthetic natural feature of the parks that visitors greatly enjoy. The terrestrial wildlife found within the parks occupies a variety of habitats. Most species are native and adapted to the California landscape and climate. The District manages animals that are not native to the region or are feral (domestic animals that have returned to a wild, untamed condition) to minimize conflicts with native species. The District is responsible for the protection of all wildlife, including animals that are state and federally listed as rare, threatened, and/or endangered, and others which are of local concern. Certain additional species, whose specific habitat requirements limit their population size and distribution, may require special management to reduce the potential for isolation or loss of the population.

EBRPD protects habitat of rare, threatened, and endangered species, such as the elusive kit fox (Vulpes macrotis mutica), found at Round Valley, Vasco Caves, and Black Diamond Mines, all regional preserves in Contra Costa County.

[Master Plan 1997]

Given the vision of the last two paragraphs, how is it that the EBRPD would introduce 185 cattle into a 360 acre park (SVOS-N) and allow the destruction of the habitat for the threatened California red-legged frog species and many other wildlife species? The only reason that the District finally responded to concerns of the author and the CBD, was the threat of a lawsuit for take of a threatened species. If threatened and endangered species are treated in this manner, one can only imagine the degree of protection of the rest of the wildlife species that inhabit the wildlands of the EBRPD. The truth is that wildlife are not protected at all.

The District will conserve, enhance, and protect native animal species and enhance their habitats to maintain viable wildlife populations within balanced ecosystems. Non-native and feral animals will be managed to minimize conflicts
with native wildlife species. The District will cooperate on a regular basis with other public and private land managers and recognized wildlife management experts to address wildlife management issues on a regional scale.

Aquatic Wildlife -- East Bay residents have a rich and varied fisheries resource in the District's ten freshwater lakes, numerous ponds, streams, and miles of Bay and Delta shoreline. The District fisheries program protects, conserves, enhances, and restores native fish and amphibian species, and offers myriad recreational angling opportunities to the public (See Chapter III). Angler use fees support fish planting programs and habitat enhancement projects that encourage the growth of the game fish population. As part of this effort, and in cooperation with the California Department of Fish and Game, the District manages a major fresh water lake fishery enhancement program that includes habitat improvements and regular stocking of game, fish.

The District will conserve, enhance and restore native fish and amphibian populations and their habitats; will develop aquatic facilities, where appropriate, to create a wide variety of fisheries; will monitor fisheries resources to determine species composition, size, population, and growth rates; and will cooperate with the State Department of Fish and Game to conserve, enhance and manage its fisheries resources for ecological and recreational benefit.

This report will clearly demonstrate that the habitat for wildlife is not being preserved or protected in any way. In fact habitat is being decimated by trampling and consumed with a goal of maximizing forage grasses for cattle production. It is deeply troubling that an agency that proclaims “an environmental ethic guides us in all that we do” will only consider protecting (and then only with undue public pressure) wildlife habitat for threatened species yet the habitat for unthreatened species can be destroyed without concern.

Rare, Threatened and Endangered (RTE) Species Management
The concept of a RTE species management program should be one that meshes with an overall plant and wildlife management program that strives to preserve, protect and enhance the presence of various species in the parks. Lamentably this is not the case in EBRPD parks. Any focus on preservation and protection is merely the result of the protections mandated by federal laws. The pro-active management efforts to protect ALL plants and wildlife are diminutive within the parks and this is regrettable.

RARE, THREATENED & ENDANGERED SPECIES MANAGEMENT

Park wildlands contain numerous plants and animals that are designated as rare, threatened, or endangered (RTE) or are candidates for such a designation. Many of these species are indigenous to the Bay Area, while others occur more widely. These species are vulnerable to changing conditions brought about by natural processes or by human activities that introduce non-native plants and animals, destroy critical habitat, or eliminate individual species or populations. The District must comply with federal and state Endangered Species Acts, which mandate protection of RTE species and their habitats. Other plants and animals found in the parks, while not officially listed, are locally rare and deserve some level of protection.

The District will identify, evaluate, conserve, enhance, and restore rare, threatened, endangered, or locally important species of plants and animals and their habitats, using scientific research, field experience, and other proven
methodologies. Populations of listed species will be monitored through periodic observations of their condition, size, habitat, reproduction, and distribution. Conservation of rare, threatened, and endangered species of plants and animals and their supporting habitats will take precedence over other activities, if the District determines that the other uses and activities would have a significant adverse effect on these natural resources.

[Master Plan 1997]

This report will clearly demonstrate that the habitat for RTE species is not being preserved and protected in the parks. One of the reasons RTE and other wildlife species are at risk is that the District introduces cattle into parks without first determining if RTE species exist. This was the case at SVOS-N where the habitat of the California red-legged frog was being trampled by cattle and severely degraded. When such occurrences exist, the District then applies the BM to justify why such species are not being protected by proclaiming that since the species are still found in these degraded habitats then everything is magnificent.

This is exactly what transpired during the GRTF process. Board members gleefully proclaimed that the threatened California red-legged frogs, prevalent in many of the District’s parks, were being pulled out of cattle-trashed ponds within the parks. So rather than comply with federal law, District management will claim that there is no proof that cattle trampling has any effect on California red-legged frog habitat. Such a spineless position further demonstrates the lack of leadership, knowledge and integrity within the EBRPD, hence the need for consideration of state legislation to create an oversight agency for regional park districts. There is simply too much at stake to allow our dwindling natural resources to become extinct as a result of actions by non-compliant land stewards such as the EBRPD.

Land Use Plans – EBRPD Vehicle for CEQA Compliance

When the District approved its Wildland Management Policies & Guidelines document in 1992, it chose to issue a Negative Declaration in lieu of doing a CEQA analysis for its grazing policies. The reasoning being that

“The Master Plan amendment does not specify any specific action at any specific location or time. Thus, identification of impacts becomes speculative.”

So the District claimed that it would comply with environmental impact reporting through CEQA by issuing Land Use Plans for each park, addressing the cattle grazing impacts at that time. The following is an excerpt from the Master Plan 1997:

A Land Use Plan (LUP) is the long-range plan for an entire park. It evaluates park resources, documents and recommends programs for managing and conserving these resources, discusses key planning issues, indicates relevant policies, and offers proposals for future recreational and service facilities to provide for the range of public recreational needs in the park. LUPs help the District and the public keep abreast of information that is critical to managing the parks wisely. An LUP typically includes a description and evaluation of existing facilities and natural and cultural resources; an assessment of public needs (which the District has ascertained by conducting surveys and receiving comment
from residents); and a discussion of issues such as legal agreements and restrictions, adjacent land uses, pedestrian and vehicular access and circulation, parking, selection of appropriate recreational activities, and options for facilities and utility service. It also establishes **Land Use Designations**, which indicate the various levels of resource protection and recreational intensity in the parks. Not all regional parklands have LUPs; one of the District's long-term goals is to create an LUP for every park.

This is a prime example of the circular arguments presented by the EBRPD to avoid preparation of an environmental impact report (i.e. CEQA). First of all, not all parks under grazing management have LUPs, even many that have been operational for decades. Secondly, note that there is no reference to preparation of addressing environmental issues such as CEQA. The District constantly sends those interested in promoting such issues in circles hoping they will never catch on to their ways.

It is insufficient to state that having LUPs for each park is a long-term goal while parks continue to be destroyed by cattle. **The directive should be “no LUP -- no cattle grazing” because the environmental impacts of livestock grazing have not been assessed.** Allowing rancher’s cattle to graze these park wildlands and dramatically transform them into wastelands until the District gets around to doing an LUP is deceitful and irresponsible.

**Has the EBRPD Vision Been Blinded By Bovines?**

These excerpts from the Master Plan 1997 illustrate that there really was a conscious effort on behalf of the founders of the EBRPD, the authors of Master Plan 1997 and the public to project a vision that was to be environmentally responsible. However, this vision has been blinded for decades by an underlying policy premise that has created a ever-growing chasm that will forever prevent the District from reaching the place where it can truthfully say **“an environmental ethic guides us in all that we do”**. For whatever the reason, there are a handful of individuals within the EBRPD that will not let go of the idea that parks must be grazed by cattle. The long term damage that has been done to all of the District’s parks by ranching interests will take generations to restore. And that restoration process will not even begin until responsible management can be put into place. The EBRPD needs leaders not followers.