2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The parks belong to the public and the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) is the appointed agency that has responsibility for preserving and protecting these parks on behalf of the public. The largest managed asset of the park District is the 80,000+ acres of open space. The visionaries that founded the EBRPD in 1934 realized that this most important asset must be actively protected because its enjoyment is one of the “key elements of the quality of life” for the residents of Alameda and Contra Costa counties.

As designated land stewards, the EBRPD is expected to be honest and forthright with the public while being uncompromising in its pursuit of the protection and preservation of the open space natural resources which are a most significant part of these lands. In light of this responsibility the District has decreed that “an environmental ethic guides us in all that we do”. The public has serious doubts as to whether the District is indeed maintaining the high standards and expectations put forth by its founders.

The Grazing Review Task Force (GRTF) was commissioned by the EBRPD General Manager, Mr. Pat O’Brien in response to increasing public pressure to do something about the declining park experience. This decline has a highly significant correlation to the presence of cattle grazing in the parks. Therefore Mr. O’Brien requested an objective comprehensive public review of the District’s grazing policies and procedures. To the public’s dismay, the GRTF review could hardly be described as comprehensive, let alone objective.

The Condition of the Parks is Deplorable

This report is a summary of the GRTF Review but more importantly it is an expose’ of the serious mismanagement of our park’s open space by politicians and District managers who seem to think that supporting and facilitating cattle ranching in the parks is more important than protecting and preserving our public wildlands. The damage to the parks is astounding. The lack of integrity, honesty and environmental knowledge displayed during the GRTF process was deeply troubling. The District’s inability to even begin looking objectively at the problems associated with cattle grazing in the parks is highly suspect. The close relationship with the cattle industry is intended to be quite secretive yet is so obvious. District rules and regulations are being broken on all fronts. This is allowing ranchers to do “business as usual” in our parks without management scrutiny. It has been this way for decades and the public wants it to stop. The people want their parks back and they want the cattle removed. If the wildlife & plants could talk, similar sentiments would be expressed but more emphatically since it is their habitat that has been assaulted. The biodiversity in the parks is pathetic. It is better described as bio-bovinity, since the bovines reign supreme.

This report begins by taking a sampling of conditions at the Sycamore Valley Open Space – North (SVOS-N) in Danville, California. This 357 acre park represents only a very small sample of the 60,000+ acres that are grazed by cattle in the EBRPD. The 150+ pages of photographs from this park graphically illustrate the magnitude of the grazing problem.

The following two pages are photographic collages of conditions that can be found in two types of parks. The first collage represents conditions often found in EBRPD parks. The second collage is that of a bovine-free park. Such conditions are found on ungrazed lands not managed by the EBRPD.
A Park Grazed by Cattle
A Park Not Grazed by Cattle
Mt. Diablo State Park's Purpose for Eliminating Grazing Ignored

The impacts of cattle grazing on the natural resources found in the open space of the Bay Area are severe. The Mt. Diablo State Park system banned cattle from its parks in 1989 for exactly that reason. As early as 1979, Mr. Herbert Rhodes, then Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation for the California State Park System (CSPS), stated the following to Mr. Richard Trudeau, then General Manager of the EBRPD:

“Generally, we find that grazing is inconsistent with our objectives in those units of the State Park System which have a strong dedication to the preservation of natural values. It is impossible to contemplate the achievement of natural conditions on grasslands under grazing, since grazing by cattle tends to discourage the native species...”

The CSPS initiated an Environmental Impact Review (EIR) as part of 1989 General Plan. The results of this EIR confirmed the statements made by Mr. Rhodes. The conditions found at SVOS-N further validated the EIR findings and provide further impetus as to why the District’s grazing program should be discontinued. However, the District’s GRTF conveniently avoided any reference to the Mt. Diablo data and decisions throughout the GRTF process.

Mr. Rhodes further stated that:

“As to a strong role in the reduction of fire hazards, our experience has indicated that, generally, one does not achieve a meaningful reduction in fire hazard until serious overgrazing problems are experienced.”

This statement defeats one of the principal excuses used by the District to justify its grazing program. The CSPS position was further substantiated by a retired District firefighter who indicated he had fought many grass fires on the District’s overgrazed lands.

The Mt. Diablo model of how to preserve and protect open space resources is one that sets a responsible environmental example for the District to follow.

Public Safety – Another Critical Issue Intentionally Overlooked

There are numerous facets to the public safety issue. Most importantly EBRPD records show that cattle are unpredictable and have attacked unsuspecting park visitors. In some cases, serious injuries were inflicted upon park users by cattle from head butting and trampling. A Palo Alto woman was blind-sided by a cow at Sunol Regional Park and then kicked and trampled for several minutes as she screamed in horror. A year and half after the incident, this woman still suffers physically from the injuries inflicted. A Danville resident was hiking and also blind-sided by a cow that catapulted him nearly 10 feet into the air landing him in adjacent pond. Must we wait for the tragic death of a child or an elderly person before cattle are prevented from being allowed to roam free in the parks?

Pets have been attacked as well. A Danville resident had one of her dogs kicked in the chest resulting in a collapsed lung. The dog nearly died in the park after the incident. The dog owner had to spend nearly $2,000 in vet bills to save her dog.

There Is No Grazing Management at the EBRPD

While there is a “grazing management program” at the EBRPD, no one is managing it. The program is outlined in the District’s Wildlands Management Policies & Guidelines
document, which it has been using since 1992. This document specifies monitoring and reporting requirements that are necessary for a successful program. However, the District was unable to provide any such monitoring reports. Furthermore, the District’s grazing licenses (i.e. leases) are not being enforced per the letter of the document. This report cites example after example of ranchers and the EBRPD failing to fulfill the actions required by the license. This is resulting in massive loss of habitat for the fauna and flora that used to reside on the District’s wildlands.

The District should also be embarrassed by its non-conformance with the environmental laws of California. The fact that the District went to court to fight a lawsuit forcing them to do an EIR on its grazing program is indicative of its environmentally irresponsible nature. For over 30 years the District has stressed the importance of Land Use Plans (LUPs) and EIRs in its planning processes. Of the 58 parks grazed by cattle, only 17 parks (29.3%) had completed LUPs in conjunction with EIRs, 33 parks (56.9%) did not even have an LUP while 40 parks (69%) never had an EIR. Only 5 parks (8.6%) have completed LUPs/EIRs prepared after the WMP&G was written (8/18/92). Noting that the District’s Negative Declaration prepared for this policy document allegedly declared that environmental impacts of the grazing program would be addressed specifically in each LUP/EIR in order to satisfy requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The 53 parks without current LUPs/EIRs make up 55,245 acres (92.2%) of the 59,903 acres of grazing land in the District.

**The Grazing Task Force Review Was Politically Motivated**

The timing of the GRTF review was strategically planned and critically calculated. The review process was timed to start during the year 2000, when the District planned to go to the public for additional management and operating funds through a bond measure. The District was determined to make sure that this request for management funds would pass in the 2000 election. The grazing review would provide an opportunity for the District to appear to be addressing the growing complaints about its grazing policies while at the same time arguing that the only way to solve the grazing problems is to have more money and more staff. The GRTF review was started early enough in the year to identify the issues that could support the needs for the “new” Measure W, but ended several months after the election. This timing was such that if any controversy occurred as a result of the process, it would not interfere with the election and hopeful passage of the new measure.

To the District’s dismay, a bigger financial fiasco manifested itself in the late spring of 2000. Gross fiscal mismanagement by the EBRPD was uncovered by an independent auditor. This financial irresponsibility led the General Manager and the Board of Directors to postpone the original plans to place the measure on the November 2000 ballot. The District is now bringing this measure to the voters in March of 2002 as Measure K.

**Legislative Intervention Required for Environmental Oversight of EBRPD**

The only way the public will regain control of its parks is through legislative action. This report clearly shows that the EBRPD considers itself above the law with its allegiance directed not towards the people of the Bay Area but rather towards special interests, namely the ranching industry. The people, plants and wildlife are virtually ignored. New laws are necessary to establish a much needed oversight for the regional parks in California to stop the assault on biodiversity in the name of wildlands and habitat preservation.