4 THE NEED FOR THIS REPORT

In the past 20 years the problems associated with livestock grazing in the Western US have received increasing attention. The amount of open space is dwindling and has become a precious commodity in the Bay Area. Scrutiny by those concerned with preserving our remaining open space has uncovered that fact that management of public lands by public agencies is favoring private business interests rather than the interests of the public.

While professional ecologists have done a significant amount of research that identifies the many problems associated with livestock grazing, there is little research that focuses on a specific site showing the various environmental impacts over an extended period of time. The primary goal of this report is to do just that, while refuting much of the misinformation that is spread by agencies such as the EBRPD for the sole purpose of perpetuating livestock grazing on public lands. Many written comments and scientific literature were submitted during the GRTF process, but this report compiles an abundance of photographs that clearly show that livestock grazing is harmful in a multitude of ways to the environment and is not conducive to the preservation of parkland natural resources.

Now that the “comprehensive public review process” is finished, it is clear to most public observers of the process that the record would not be complete without some comment from the public sector about this process. The purpose of this report is to show the fact that, contrary to the GRTF proclamation that it has completed a comprehensive public review, what the General Manager asked for was an objective comprehensive public review of the District’s grazing policies and procedures. The GRTF review could hardly be described as comprehensive, let alone objective.

In the EBRPD press release of 2/2/00, referred to above in section 3, the General Manager specifically recommended the following:

“... use of outside experts on wildlife and range management, as well as the Park District's own staff, to allow an objective, scientific review of grazing issues.”

The two items highlighted in red from this excerpt: 1) the use of outside experts on wildlife and range management and 2) an objective, scientific review are two critical aspects of the process that were completely ignored. This is important to remember when reviewing the reports and other conclusions prepared by District staff for the GRTF. In fact, at the beginning of the GRTF process, the public had requested that a panel of experts be invited to debate and openly discuss the pros and cons of cattle-grazing. It was agreed early on by GRTF members and EBRPD staff that such a debate and discussion would be a desirable event. The event never occurred even though it was referenced as a future agenda item at several different GRTF proceedings.

The blatant lack of objectivity that tainted the entire process caused the public to become disenchanted with the process before it officially started. During the preliminary phase of the process it became clear very quickly that it was not to be an objective scientific review of EBRPD grazing practices. Instead it became a prejudiced process that was manipulated by EBRPD management at every turn.
Hence, the need for this report, which summarizes the sentiments of many citizens who witnessed much of what transpired during the so-called comprehensive public review. Another reason for this report, aside from the lack of objectivity and integrity of the GRTF process, is the divergence between the actions of the current Board and senior management at the EBRPD, and the representations made in other policy documents of the District.

There has been an element of arrogance in the attitudes and actions of the EBRPD. The public, who pays their salaries and provides over 70% of the District’s operating budget, are frequently treated like annoyances and morons. There is a prevailing notion that we, the public, are completely gullible and uneducated. For example, the author has made frequent requests for public information. Often the response to certain questions was either simply refused or consisted of “that was covered during the Grazing Task Force Review, which you participated in…” Perhaps it was, and perhaps the author was not present at the time certain information was disseminated or discussed. However, this attitude does not demonstrate that the District is indeed acting on behalf of the public, but is simply a display of condescension and antagonism.
On December 17, 1996 the EBRPD Board of Directors adopted the **MASTER PLAN 1997** as Resolution No: 1996-12-349. The page opposite the Table of Contents in this plan has a letter written by the Board members. This letter is shown below. Note that six of the seven current Board members participated in this effort and signed the letter. Board member Jocelyn Combs (not shown) was later replaced by Ayn Wieskamp in 1998. Photographs have been added to this letter for the purposes of identifying current Board members who signed this letter and are ultimately responsible for park damage identified in this report.

Dear Friends,

It is with great pleasure that the Board of Directors presents the 1997 East Bay Regional Park District Master Plan. This Master Plan pledges the continued implementation of the visions and ideals of the public spirited citizens who formed the District in 1934 and dedicates this continued effort to those who have worked selflessly over the past 63 years to create and care for this extraordinary Regional Park System.

The 1997 District Master Plan will guide us for the next decade, well into the 21st Century. Our hopes and dreams for the future of the East Bay Regional Park District are embodied in this plan. The Master Plan recognizes the two primary duties of the District: the conservation of our scenic, natural, and open space resources and the provision of needed recreation opportunities, and describes the process to find a proper balance between these responsibilities. The Master Plan also recognizes the need to expand our parks, trails, and services as a proper response to the need of our dynamic, diverse, and growing region.

Many citizens worked countless hours on the preparation and review of this Master Plan. The Board of Directors deeply appreciates this public participation and we commit ourselves to continue to work with you, our neighbors and friends to provide the highest standard of resource conservation and recreational service for the citizens of Alameda and Contra Costa counties.
On the last page of the document a “Steering Team” was identified and the top two members identified are Mr. Pat O’Brien and Mr. Tom Mikkelsen. Both identified as managers holding the same positions they do now, General Manager and Assistant General Manager, Planning/Stewardship, Design, and Construction respectively.

The point here is that these individuals are the same individuals that either participated in the GRTF Review or publicly announced that they supported the GRTF’s findings and positions with respect to the current and proposed changes to the District’s cattle grazing policies.

The commitment of the Board and the EBRPD is quite clear as stated in this letter. There are two particularly important commitments that should be noted here:

1. The Master Plan recognizes the two primary duties of the District: the conservation of our scenic, natural, and open space resources and the provision of needed recreation opportunities, and describes the process to find a proper balance between these responsibilities.

2. …we [Board of Directors] commit ourselves to continue to work with you [the public], our neighbors and friends to provide the highest standard of resource conservation...

Later on in this report, specific details of this Master Plan 1997 will be discussed in the context of the present conditions of the EBRPD Parks and the policy of insisting on the continued use of cattle-grazing as the principal vegetation management option. Of equal concern is the District’s insistence that cattle grazing is the highest and best use of the land.

Finally, the District’s Public Policies Manual dated August 16, 1988 states:

4.6 Range Management Technical Advisory Committee (Resolution 1988-4-146)

The District's grazing program now encompasses more than 30,000 acres of rangelands, and the proper management of this program requires the immediate access to the most current scientific information in the field of Range Science.

A volunteer Range Management Technical Advisory Committee (RMTAC) will be established to provide staff with advice on all technical matters related to the District’s grazing program. The Committee will be composed of qualified Range Management experts and/or experts in closely related technical fields such as wildlife management and will be appointed by the Board following a recommendation from the Resources Committee.

In 1992 such a committee published the District’s Wildland Management Policies & Guidelines (WMP&G) document. This 18 page document, of which only 4.5 pages address grazing explicitly, contains a broad set of non-specific guidelines. The lack of specificity in the implementation of policies and guidelines results in a management program that is ineffective and not enforced. The RMTAC seems to have vanished at this point. There appears to be no one providing any advice to the EBRPD except for ranchers. While the concept of RMTAC is commendable, the suggestion that it should be primarily composed of range management experts was the first mistake. Range managers are primarily experts in managing land for purposes of cattle production. This is an inappropriate land use for public parks as this report will show.
The *WMP&G* document states that these policies and guidelines apply modern resource management practices based upon scientific principles supported by available research. One only needs to read the transcripts and reports submitted by the GRTF to find that the District avoids the use of any research based upon peer-reviewed scientific data and principles. The District’s decisions are based solely upon anecdotal conjecture from unqualified sources. There are numerous sources of peer-reviewed scientific data that could be used by the District to make sound management decisions. However, these are avoided like the plague as it would certainly invalidate current management practices, which are having a devastating impact upon the parklands wildlife and natural resources.

The document further states that “the District will incorporate into its management program new scientific information as it becomes available.” It is now nearly 10 years since the *WMP&G* document was originally published. The document was not updated until the 2001 GRTF process, which added absolutely no new scientific information, even though a myriad of scientific papers were written since 1992 about methods for identifying and minimizing the impacts of livestock grazing. Apparently the District thinks it knows all there is to know about the scientific aspects of wildlands management yet its own wildlands are in a shambles.

While the focus of this report is about the mismanagement of the District’s livestock grazing program and its assault on biodiversity, the report covers a wide variety of associated topics that further illustrate the ineptitude and lack of responsiveness by those presently managing the District. The findings of this report will exemplify the need to change the manner in which critical decisions are made regarding the open space of the East Bay. The conclusions of this report will prescribe legislative changes necessary relating to the authority of regional parks in order that residents, whose open space lands are part of the regional parklands, can break the stronghold that private business interests have over public parkland land-use decisions. No longer should a handful of individuals be left to make such decisions for the millions of individuals who live in the San Francisco Bay Area.