9 ABOUT THE EBRPD

This description was obtained from the District’s Master Plan 1997 and updated accordingly if more recent figures or information is known. This information is 5 years out of date.

The jurisdiction of the East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) includes all of Alameda and Contra Costa Counties in the San Francisco Bay Area. The District is the primary provider of regional park facilities and activities for this two-county area. The regional park system consists of 59 regional parklands and over 1,000 miles of trails on approximately 92,000 acres of land. The District is governed by a publicly elected Board of Directors. Its administrative headquarters are located in Oakland, California.

Under the California Public Resources Code (Article 3, 5500 series), the District has the power to "...acquire land...to plan...develop...and operate a system of public parks, playgrounds, golf courses, beaches, trails, natural areas, ecological and open space preserves, parkways, scenic drives, boulevards and other facilities for public recreation, for the use and enjoyment of all the inhabitants of the District...to conduct programs and classes in outdoor science education and conservation education...to employ a police force...prevent and suppress fires...and to do all other things necessary or convenient to carry out the purposes of the District." This broad mandate is key to understanding the District's complex responsibilities to its constituents.

The regional parks offer an extraordinary choice of educational and recreational activities. The District's Interpretive Division operates nine interpretive and educational centers (including two summer-only satellite centers and one outdoor exhibit), and provides programs to interpret the natural, cultural, and historical features of the region, such as the historic farm (Ardenwood), sand and coal mines (Black Diamond), Native American shell mounds (Coyote Hills), a botanical garden of California plants and a nature area (Tilden), oak woodland and grasslands (Sunol), and the San Francisco Bay shoreline (Crown Memorial State Beach).

Most of the regional parklands are large open space areas where the public can roam the trails by foot, horseback, or bicycle. Trail users have access to 1,000 miles of trails within the parks, including 150 miles of inter-park regional trails. The ridges and peaks afford spectacular panoramic views. The valleys, canyons, and large open space expanses provide seclusion and escape from the hustle and bustle of the surrounding urban environment. The natural conditions preserved by these parklands provide a healthy ecosystem for plants and wildlife.

Park entrances are designed for easy access, and recreational facilities are generally located close to the edges of the parks. Park facilities include picnic sites, some with turf meadows and children's play structures; camping areas, both nearby and remote; and miles of multi-use trails. Lakes, lagoons, and shoreline areas offer opportunities for swimming, boating, fishing, bird watching and other water-related activities.
History of the EBRPD

The following historical description was also obtained from the District’s Master Plan 1997.

The first regional parks were established on watershed land owned by the East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD). In 1928, when EBMUD declared surplus some 10,000 acres of former watershed lands in the East Bay hills, the announcement was the impetus for a concerted effort by East Bay community leaders who had urged for years that some of these lands should be open to the public.

Ultimately the regional park movement involved a cross-section of the East Bay community: outdoor recreation enthusiasts, political leaders, city officials, academicians, members of organized labor, civic, community organizations, and ordinary citizens who recognized the value of regional parks close to home. A vigorous lobbying effort culminated in the passage in 1933 of AB 1114, which authorized establishment of a regional park district and a board to govern it. Then on November 6, 1934, voters approved the East Bay Regional Park District and its tax rate by a margin of greater than two to one.

The foresight of the community leaders who seized the opportunity to preserve open space lands for public recreational use was especially remarkable in that it anticipated trends that were not obvious at the time. In 1934, America was experiencing the worst economic depression in its history. Neither the Golden Gate nor the Bay Bridge was finished. Alameda County had a population of only 475,000 people. Contra Costa County was mostly farms and ranches—its urban and suburban expansion awaited World War II and the postwar baby boom. Although there was open space all around, concerned citizens realized that it would have to be formally set aside as parkland in order to preserve the region’s natural beauty for present and future inhabitants to enjoy. Their efforts led to the creation of the East Bay Regional Park District.

The District’s subsequent history has been one of increased service, both in terms of land stewardship and programmatic responsibilities, as its constituency has become more populous, complex, and culturally diverse. Gradually at first, then more rapidly, the District acquired more parklands and expanded its area of jurisdiction. The Hayward area joined the District in 1956. Fremont voters approved annexation in 1958. Most of Contra Costa County joined the District in 1964, the Pleasanton area in 1966, East Contra Costa in 1981, and finally the Livermore area in 1992, resulting in the full two-county jurisdiction.

With increasingly complex demands upon District resources came the need for increasingly sophisticated planning processes. The District’s first comprehensive, two-county master plan was approved in 1973. It outlined balanced acquisitions to be distributed throughout the region, and also
envisioned a wide variety of parklands for the public to enjoy. Since then, the Master Plan has been revised every six to seven years to reflect the rapid changes that the region is undergoing and the new circumstances to which the District must respond.

*Public open space and recreation are key elements of the quality of life in Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. This philosophy, established in the 1930s, will continue to guide the East Bay Regional Park District into the next century.*

**The Impetus for the Review of EBRPD Grazing Policy**

The catalyst for the review of the District’s grazing policy and the formation of the GRTF was primarily attributed to the increasing controversy over the District’s livestock grazing policies. The controversy stems over many issues but this report’s primary emphasis is the ongoing ecological damage to our park wildlands and resources by an agency that claims that “*an environmental ethic guides us in all that we do.*” Additionally, there has been increasing public discontent with:

- an arrogant display of non-ecological concern by the EBRPD board and staff
- blatant influence by the ranching community on EBRPD decisions
- continued degradation of the parks in general, even after numerous complaints identifying specific cases were noted to staff and the GRTF
- no honest intention to resolve public concerns about the degraded park experience
- lack of monitoring and enforcement of stated grazing policies
- no desire to comprehensively study and understand the impacts of cattle grazing
- trails and hillside soils littered with cow feces
- complete interruption of many ecological cycles in parks caused by cattle, such as:
  - destruction of habitat
  - loss of wildlife flora and fauna
  - displacement of wildlife from the parks
- trail and hillside soils damage and erosion
- unsafe park conditions due to the often unpredictable presence of cattle on the trails
- preventing public access to certain parks, such as Sycamore Valley South, by placing them in land-bank status for decades yet giving ranchers full access for grazing during that time

More importantly, the damage being caused by cattle grazing may be irreversible. There are areas in EBRPD parks that the author has researched that have not been grazed for nearly 15 years yet have not recovered from the impacts of previous grazing.

There are numerous other issues that are being raised by Bay Area environmentalists relating to grazing such as destruction of critical habitat. Even though the EBRPD has chosen to stick its head in the sand so as not to appear to see or hear what the real truths are about grazing in its parks, the public will avidly continue to pursue change in this
most critical area. Livestock grazing is having devastating consequences upon park habitat and wildlife, more so than any other human-driven activity.

This report will cite many examples of such problems at East Bay Regional Parks in the Danville area. The Sycamore Valley Open Space (North & South) parks, herein referred to as SVOS-N and SVOS-S respectively, have been monitored quite extensively by the author for the 1999, 2000 and 2001 grazing seasons. The author will continue to this monitoring as long as livestock grazing continues in these parks.