

EBRPD Grazing Policy Violations Report

Overgrazing & Erosion at Sycamore Valley Open Space - North

Friends of Sycamore Valley

January 20, 2003

4 Introduction

The East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) was founded by visionaries in 1934 who realized the importance of preserving the open space of the San Francisco Bay Area. It is essential to stress the word **preserving** as it seems to have lost its meaning in recent years. Webster defines preserve as “to keep safe from harm or destruction”. The parklands within the EBRPD are not being preserved, instead they are being exploited and destroyed by for-profit commercial ranching businesses as they graze their cattle throughout the majority of the park district’s 92,913 acres (50,255 in Alameda County; 42,658 in Contra Costa County) of parklands and open space.

FSV is producing this series to increase public awareness of the seriousness of the impacts of cattle grazing on wildlife habitat and on beautiful natural resources that used to be present in the EBRPD open space. This series is also intended to highlight the continuing lack of leadership at the highest levels within the EBRPD, including the Board of Directors, when it comes to enforcing district grazing policies. FSV will continue to publish this series describing grazing policy violations as long as they continue to be so prevalent throughout the park district. The focus will continue to be SVOS-N with expanding coverage to include other grazed parks. SVOS-N was chosen for monitoring because it had not been grazed for over 10 years when the park district was given management responsibility in 1998. The resulting impacts of EBRPD grazing policies on this land are well documented in the FSV report, *An Assault on Biodiversity in the Name of Wildlands and Habitat Preservation*, (initial release 2/25/02, amended 11/3/02, by G. Schneider. <http://rangenet.org/directory/schneiderg/2002report/>).

As a result of the aforementioned report by FSV, the district can no longer claim that cattle grazing does not have negative impacts upon district parklands. Misinformation that has been disseminated by EBRPD staff about the benefits of cattle grazing with no supportable documentation has been debunked. The facts are well documented in the original FSV report and very clear to the contrary.

5 Purpose of Report

The primary purpose of this report is to document the excessive erosion damage at SVOS-N. The long-term impacts that result from the EBRPD failing to enforce grazing policies within the regional park district are severe. Although the policy violations documented in this report refer to SVOS-N, they can be found in all of the parks that are included in the EBRPD grazing program. The park district has had strict policies and guidelines in place regarding grazing for at least 10 years. These policies were initially put into place by a task force in the early 90’s in order to prevent damage to the parks from cattle grazing.

There are three principle documents that set forth the EBRPD grazing policies. These are:

- 1) *Master Plan 1997* – this planning document was prepared by the EBRPD in conjunction with public input. The plan is a well thought out approach to preserving the open space for the public. Unfortunately, those who participated on behalf of the public expected the EBRPD to be effective in the plan’s implementation. This has not been the case.
- 2) *Wildlands Management Policies & Guidelines* – this is a broad brush, general policy document. While this is the only policy document specifically addressing the grazing

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program, it is significantly lacking in specifics with regard to policy implementation.

- 3) ***Grazing License*** – this is the grazing lease, of which one is completed for each park that is grazed by livestock. While this is not specifically a policy document, it does contain more specific information about the obligations of the park district (licensor) and the rancher (licensee).

The park district's Land Use Plans (LUPs) are also supposed to address the environmental impacts of grazing to satisfy California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requirements of the State of California per EBRPD management directives and the EBRPD *Master Plan 1997*. However, as documented in the previous FSV report, the District's LUPs are extremely weak in this regard. In fact, 92% of grazed parklands are lacking a current LUP/EIR that addresses grazing impacts.

The major problem with the grazing program in its current implementation is that the most important elements of the program are not being enforced at all. This is resulting in extensive destruction of the park's natural resources and wildlife habitat.

This report focuses on one of the most significant elements of grazing mismanagement: ***overgrazing***. When overgrazing is allowed to occur year after year as it has at SVOS-N, it is only a matter of time when severe weather conditions will arise causing substantial destruction from erosion. The negligence by EBRPD management has caused significant erosion damage which is documented in this report.

The report compares erosion damage of the approximately 700 acres of ungrazed open space that surrounds SVOS-N to that which has occurred within the parks. This study clearly shows that grazed land experiences erosion damage more frequently than non-grazed land.