

EBRPD Grazing Policy Violations Report

Overgrazing & Erosion at Sycamore Valley Open Space - North

Friends of Sycamore Valley

January 20, 2003

9 Conclusions

There are numerous conclusions that can be drawn from the data presented in this report. The conclusions simply substantiate information that was already known by the EBRPD – grazing is harmful to the environment. The park district has known this for at least 15 years because the California State Parks System (CSPS) concluded in its Mt. Diablo State Park Environmental Impact Report (EIR) that “*cattle grazing is an activity that is harmful to the environment and inconsistent with the agency’s strong dedication to the preservation of natural values.*”

It is simply irresponsible for the EBRPD Board of Directors, General Manager and upper management to have disregarded the data in this EIR in addition to all of the information that has been prepared by FSV substantiating the EIR conclusions. The essential environmental goals of the EBRPD should be no different than those of the CSPS. Commercial, for-profit ranching businesses should not be conducting their operations in our public parks.

9.1 Grazing Mismanagement Detrimental to Wildlands Health

The principal conclusion that can be drawn from this report is that if grazing management policies are not enforced the result can be disastrous. While the park district continues to allow uncontrolled grazing to occur, the land is being destroyed and what little habitat and sensitive vegetation that has survived is disappearing and will remain so for at least a generation.

The cumulative effect of mismanagement has resulted in very significant erosion damage in SVOS-N. The damage noted in this report is not unique. The impacts of grazing are universal and similar impacts will be found throughout the park district.

There is a direct correlation to the FSV finding that there is a **739% higher incidence of landslides** and erosion damage per acre within the park as compared to ungrazed land outside the park. Surrounding open space which is ungrazed has no unique differences in soil composition or topography. The only difference between the SVOS-N park and the surrounding open space is that fact that one is grazed and one is not. **The statistically significant difference in incidence of landslides must be attributed to the presence of cattle.**

9.2 Myth: Grazing is Beneficial for Land & Habitat

The Soil Conservation Service determined that 21% of the US (outside of Alaska) has been ecologically trashed by cattle grazing. A 1989 General Accounting Office report found that livestock were the major source of riparian degradation on public lands in the West. This report and the FSV Feb 2002 report (see Reference 4) confirm these statistics. The damage to the land never stops, it continues to accumulate. Most erosion damage from a practical standpoint is irreversible. At SVOS-N the remaining habitat and vegetation is often swept away leaving bare clay that will not support regrowth.

This and other FSV reports debunk the myth that grazing is beneficial for the land.

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9.3 Grazing Licenses Must Be Enforced

FSV's investigation clearly shows that grazing policy and Grazing License enforcement are non-existent. Grazing tenants are not fearful of reprimand or legal action for grazing violations because the district has a life-long history of non-enforcement. Such negligence promotes a "don't care" attitude among grazing tenants, which has destroyed much of the wildlife habitat within the district.

9.4 Grazing Tenants Must Be Held Responsible for Damage

It is time for the EBRPD to begin enforcing its Grazing Licenses. The first action in this regard is to terminate all leases that have been breached, such as SVOS-N. Secondly, the district must immediately survey and document damage in all of the parks. Grazing tenants must be held responsible for mitigating all documented damage.

9.5 Findings Substantiate Mt. Diablo EIR Done 15 Years Ago

In 1979 the Director of the Department of Parks & Recreation for the CSPS sent a letter to then General Manager of the EBRPD, Richard Trudeau which stated:

"It is impossible to contemplate the achievement of natural conditions on grasslands under grazing, since grazing by cattle tends to discourage the native species and encourage introduced exotics."

This report and the FSV Feb 2002 report (see Reference 4) substantiate conclusions in the Mt. Diablo EIR regarding negative trends in park conditions due to cattle grazing. It is unfathomable that even in the presence of a plethora of available information on the negative impacts of grazing that the EBRPD can continue to proclaim that cattle grazing is beneficial to park district wildlands, protects wildlife habitat and promotes biodiversity.

9.6 EBRPD Needs To Live Up to its Environmental Ethic

The EBRPD Master Plan 1997 and website (www.ebparks.org) proclaim that "**An environmental ethic guides us in all that we do.**" It is time for the park district to begin living up to this proclamation. The best way to begin the process is to place a moratorium on all grazing in the parks and do an EIR on the impacts of cattle grazing. An EIR should really not be necessary at this point, given all of the data that is presently available. Existing data should be sufficient to make a responsible decision and stop all cattle grazing in the parks.

9.7 EBRPD Must Start Conforming to State Environmental Laws

The EBRPD has been in violation of state environmental laws for many years. The park district consistently issues Negative Declarations when it comes to assessing the environmental impacts of cattle grazing. This practice is illegal and FSV would like to see the park district conform to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

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9.8 EBRPD Management: Be Responsible or Be Replaced

The lack of leadership at the highest levels of the EBRPD is outrageous. There is an escalating dissatisfaction with the present park district administration. This was further emphasized by the inability of the district to pass Measure K. While the majority of the population does not pay close attention to park district operations, there is a minority that is very aware of those operations. This minority will continue to voice its dissatisfaction with the current administration through all available means, continuing to make it difficult for the district to pass any future bond measures. If park district management continues to believe they can ignore this minority, they will soon find themselves replaced by individuals who can execute district policies responsibly and exude the level of environmental integrity expected of an elected board member.