

THE *Independent*
Newspaper & Magazine

Thursday, August 7, 2003

EBRPD Asked to Emphasize Wilderness

A coalition of local environmental and flyfishing organizations have proposed an alternative management plan, emphasizing the restoration of wilderness values, for Sunol and Ohlone Regional Parks.

The East Bay Regional Park District is beginning environmental review and taking public input on a proposed Land Use Plan that will determine land use in the parks for the next 20 years. The wilderness proposal by the Alameda Creek Alliance, Center for Biological Diversity, Livermore Flyfishers, Mission Peak Fly Anglers, Regional Parks Association, and Southern Alameda County Chapter Sierra Club calls for phasing out commercial cattle ranching operations in the parks, protecting stream habitat for sensitive species, removing unneeded roads and other infrastructure, and initiating an adaptive management plan to restore habitat for native species and preserve the wilderness values of the parks.

"Sunol and Ohlone Parks are nominally designated as 'Wilderness Regional Preserves' said Jeff Miller, Director of the Alameda Creek Alliance. "This is an opportunity for the Park District to work with community groups to actually restore wilderness values to the premiere parklands in the East Bay. The community land use plan will protect endangered species habitat, restore Alameda Creek, and enhance the natural beauty and recreational value of the parks."

Over 76% of Sunol and Ohlone Parks is currently leased for private commercial cattle grazing. Under the community plan, commercial cattle grazing would be phased out of the parks one-third at a time, allowing 3-5 years after grazing exclusion to monitor the results. Habitat for endangered and sensitive species would immediately be protected from grazing. Some of the roads, culverts, fencing, and other infrastructure not needed for emergency or public access would be removed to restore the wilderness setting of the parks.

"Mount Diablo State Park ended commercial cattle grazing in 1989, providing a local model for prioritizing natural ecosystem protection in parklands while managing for recreation, fire control, and other concerns," said Miller. "Sunol and Ohlone Preserves are the crown jewels of the East Bay Regional Park system and deserve a similar high level of protection."