

**EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT  
NATURAL/CULTURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Meeting of February 25, 2021

TO: Natural and Cultural Resources Committee

FROM: Kristina Kelchner, Assistant General Manager

SUBJECT: Review of District Policy to Protect Endangered Species at Risk of Predation by Free-Roaming Cats

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AGM for Acquisition, Stewardship & Development Kristina Kelchner will make a presentation on the District's current feral cat management program and recommended updates and revisions to the program. Staff requests that the Committee recommend to the full Board of Directors adoption of the Free-Roaming Cat Management Policy attached to this report.

**BACKGROUND**

As part of the District's mission to preserve "a rich heritage of natural and cultural resources" the District manages parklands for the protection of biodiversity including protecting and encouraging the recovery of threatened or endangered species. Free-roaming cats (*Felis catus*) are non-native predators that pose a significant threat to endangered species on District properties, particularly within protected shoreline habitats.

To address this threat to at-risk species, in 1999 the Park District's Natural and Cultural Resources Committee approved the District's current feral cat management program, following an extensive study of the impacts of feral cats on endangered species in regional parks. The program adopted by the Natural and Cultural Resources committee include the following statement:

*"The lethal removal of cats will not be permitted unless requested by State or Federal Wildlife Management Agencies, or in extreme cases where endangered or sensitive species are at risk and multiple attempts to remove cats have failed."*

This is consistent with the ethical position statement from the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA 2021):

*"When one species preys upon or competes with another to the point that a species is threatened or endangered, human intervention may be necessary. In such cases, the ASPCA advocates trapping and relocation and other humane methods of resolving the conflict; as a last resort, lethal means may be employed to protect the endangered species."*

In the fall of 2020, following unsuccessful trapping efforts and to protect endangered species, the District used lethal means as a last resort to remove free-roaming cats while the animals were actively hunting in protected marsh areas of Martin Luther King (MLK) Jr. Regional Shoreline. In

response to subsequent public concern, on December 11, 2020, the General Manager suspended authorization for staff to undertake any lethal removal of free-roaming cats and requested a full review of the District's program and discussion of the program with the Natural and Cultural Resources Committee. Staff has reviewed the existing program and is recommending adoption of the attached Free-Roaming Cat Management Policy, which provides improved practices to emphasize education and prevention, partnership with local animal service agencies, and increased collaboration and transparency with the community we serve. This policy has been developed in collaboration with several local animal services agencies. District staff appreciates the directors of these agencies sharing their expertise and support.

### Endangered Species in Regional Parks

The District's shoreline parks protect small fragments of what used to be an extensive complex of tidal wetlands that occurred throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. Today, only 5% of those wetlands remain (USGS 2021). Two federally and state-endangered species, California Ridgway's rails (*Rallus obsoletus obsoletus*) and salt marsh harvest mice (*Reithrodontomys raviventris*) live exclusively within salt or brackish marshes. These species have declined along with this loss of their habitat, and currently only persist in isolated fragments. (See Attachment A for additional information.)

Both of these species, along with state-threatened black rails (*Laterallus jamaicensis coturniculus*) and western burrowing owls (*Athene cunicularia hypugaea*), a state species-of-special-concern, occur within MLK Jr. Regional Shoreline. This shoreline park has been the focus of restoration efforts, including the establishment of a "Shorebird Sanctuary" in the New Marsh that will offer nesting habitat for the federally- and state-endangered California least tern (*Sternula antillarum browni*) and the federally-threatened Western snowy plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus*). All these species are potential prey for free-roaming cats.

The District conducts predator removal in parks in accordance with federal and state law protecting endangered species, as well as regulatory permits that require predator management to ensure that restored habitat does not create an ecological trap by attracting nesting shorebirds which are then predated by free-roaming cats.

### Domestic Cats

Cats were domesticated thousands of years ago from Egypt, and today are beloved household pets for many people. The intelligence and adaptability that makes cats highly regarded pets are the same characteristics that make them formidable and efficient predators when allowed outdoors. Domestic cats have a complicated relationship with humans that spans a continuum from domesticated indoor-only pets to a totally feral existence without any human interaction. To describe a cat's behavior and access, the term "free-roaming" is used for cats that live exclusively outdoors. Free-roaming cats can be either feral and wild with a low tolerance for humans, or abandoned pets that are tolerant and friendly towards humans but are unowned. The term "cat colony" is used to define a group of free-roaming cats, usually associated with a human-provided supplemental feeding site.

The prey drive in cats has been decoupled from a cat's need to eat. Cats are well known to play with their prey and will capture animals even when they are not hungry. This trait is a benefit in the domestic context, allowing cats to have a rich predatory life indoors when provided with the attention of their owners and interactive toys. Outdoors, this means that any cat, even those that are well-fed and cared for, can kill native amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals.

### Impacts of Free-Roaming Cats on Wildlife

An average of 2.4 billion birds per year are killed by domestic cats in the United States. (Loss et al. 2013). Worldwide, domestic cats have been linked to the extinction of 63 different species of reptiles, bird, and mammals. (Doherty et al. 2016). Cats are the single biggest direct cause of bird mortalities, followed by window strikes and automobiles. Those species most at-risk are habitat specialists that exhibit high evolutionary distinctiveness and inhabit insular environments like islands or isolated marshes. In larger, more connected areas, apex or top predators such as mountain lions or coyotes help control cat populations, moderating the impact of cats on birds and other small animals. (Crooks and Soule 1999). The East Bay's endangered shoreline species are prime examples of bird habitats most at risk from free-roaming cat predation.

Local native cats including bobcats and mountain lions are solitary. In contrast, domestic cats will share resources when food is abundant (Baron et al. 1957). The cat food provided by colony caretakers promotes cat colonies, and can also attract both non-native rats (*Rattus* sp.) and red foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) or native predators like racoons.

In addition to predation on wildlife, cat colonies increase disease or parasite transmission. The current COVID-19 pandemic has raised awareness that zoonotic diseases (diseases caused by germs spread between animals and people) can be serious. One such disease carried by cats is "Toxoplasmosis," a disease caused by a protozoan parasite. In humans, toxoplasmosis can cause birth defects, blindness, and other serious health issues (CDC 2021). Infection can be fatal in marine mammals, such as threatened sea otters, endangered Hawaiian monk seals, and manatees (Shapiro et al. 2019, Bossart et al. 2012). The impacts to sea otters are deleterious enough that in 2006, California passed legislation requiring the safe disposal of cat feces (AB 2485).

### Recommended Free-Roaming Cat Management Policy

On April 1, 1997, the Board of Directors of the East Bay Regional Park District accepted the recommendation of the Board Natural Resources Committee to establish an 18-month program to pilot program to manage free-roaming cats in the Regional Parks. At the conclusion of the pilot program the Board adopted recommendations including additional signage and collaboration with volunteers. However, in the years intervening, the volunteer program faded away and the park staff resumed responsibility for trapping of free-roaming cats.

To protect endangered wildlife, the District's rules and regulations do not permit free-roaming cat colonies or free-roaming cats on District property. Predator removal in parks is handled delicately with sensitivity and outreach to individuals or groups who are illegally feeding them. If cooperation with the individual(s) feeding the predators to remove the cats is not successful, trapping is the next step for the District staff to remove the threat to endangered species. Only

as a last resort are cats removed by firearm after hours when the park is securely closed. These efforts are coordinated with and regulated by Park District Public Safety, Operations, and Stewardship staff. Stewardship staff who perform this duty are certified in the use of firearms and always coordinate with other park staff to ensure for safety to the public.

Staff suggests that the 1999 program recommendations summarized above be replaced with a the Free-Roaming Cat Management Policy attached, which provides improved practices including the following:

- Increased efforts in education, especially in prevention of cat abandonment;
- Regular coordination meetings and collaboration with the directors of local animal shelters, rather than solely with volunteers as in the 1999 program;
- Consideration of current science and best practices regarding other methods of capture for untrappable cats;
- Increased restrictions and protocols on lethal control, including requirements for advanced coordination with animal services agencies, and advanced education, relocation, and trapping efforts; and
- Increased record-keeping and transparency, including an annual report.

A full draft of the recommended revisions to the District's Free-roaming Cat Management Policy is attached to this report. The text below provides additional background and context for the recommended policy.

### Education, Prevention, and Deterrence

Simply stated, if no one abandoned cats, the need to manage free-roaming cats would not exist. Therefore, a key component of the Policy is to work with local animal services agencies to build an informational campaign designed to educate the public on bird and mammal species threatened by cats, the poor outcomes cats face when abandoned, and options for seeking assistance from animal services agencies. This information and messaging will treat the issue of cat abandonment with empathy and support. Most people do not want to give up a household pet. Some people believe that releasing animals outside is more humane than surrendering them to an animal shelter, and some people are facing uncertain situations themselves. The core goals of this information campaign will be to:

- Acknowledge the public concern regarding lethal control,
- Address that the District takes seriously its commitment to treating all animal life humanely and its mission to protect wildlife in its parks including its legal obligation to remove predators from areas where listed endangered species are found,
- Handle the subject with sensitivity and empathy,
- Affirm the District's goal is to remove cats from our parks without the use of lethal control whenever possible, and
- Affirm the District's goal that cats removed from regional parks are adopted and live a long, full life in a safe, indoor environment.

The Regional Parks Foundation already funds endangered species habitat enhancement projects as a core pillar of support to the Park District. The Foundation's leadership has expressed interest in extending funding for educational campaigns about free-roaming cat impacts as well as assisting partnering animal shelters with funds for additional educational outreach.

In the first year, the District will revise signs and brochures to reissue (Attachments B and C). As we evaluate the successes or failures of these programs, we may add or expand on these educational programs each year. At a minimum, all components will be reviewed and revised every 5 years.

District staff will also consult with animal control specialists to identify infrastructure and management practices to reduce nuisance attractions, such as employing animal-proof trash receptacles or exclusionary fencing, to deter cats from accessing sensitive habitat areas.

#### Collaboration with Animal Service Agencies

The District has established standing meetings with the directors or managers of local animal service agencies. These directors have reviewed and provided input on the recommended updates to the District's Free-roaming Cat Management Policy. The animal service agency directors and managers often know or know of the caretakers that work with colony cats. They will provide the first point-of-contact to caretakers to ask them to assist with trapping and removal efforts. Animal service agencies, animal control officers, and cat caretakers are suitably equipped and experienced in trapping domestic animals. The District and the animal service agencies will collaborate on a long-term cooperative agreement.

The District will increase both education and collaborative trapping efforts particularly during critical nesting seasons when a free-roaming cat can inflict massive damage in a short time span or during high tide events such as king tides, when rapid action is needed to protect species as they are flooded out of the marsh into urban areas.

#### Free-roaming Cats: Locating Colonies and Removal

Staff recommends use of a survey of park staff to aid in the initial identification of free-roaming cat colonies and individual cats. Once colony locations are identified, the District will work with animal services agencies to initiate trapping and removal efforts. For all cat tracking, trapping, and activities, the District will manage and maintain spreadsheets to track:

1. Free-roaming cat observations and locations,
2. Trapping efforts (i.e. trap-nights), and
3. Captures of free-roaming cats and which shelters they are delivered to.

To every extent possible, care will be taken to avoid trapping or removing owned cats. Ideally, a half-mile buffer around the most sensitive marshes would be established as a "cat containment area," a term defined in Canberra's Draft ACT Cat Plan 2019-2029 as "all or part of a suburb, where cats must be confined to their keeper's or owner's premises at all times." This may not be feasible here, but staff will collaborate with animal services agencies to disseminate information

to encourage home and business-owners to keep their cats indoors while active trapping efforts are occurring. For example, efforts could be made to post this information at the nearest park trailheads or on social media, or to promote collars that are highly visible and deter cat protection ([birdsbesafe.com](http://birdsbesafe.com)). Special efforts would be made to educate cat owners on licensing requirements, which are required for all cats older than four months in Alameda County.

Additional coordination will be necessary if animal services or volunteers are asked to trap within District corporation yards or parks. Some sensitive marshes are off-limits to all human activity except for researchers that hold specific federal permits. These locations should be clearly communicated.

If the need arises, the District may install camera traps on District properties near feeding locations that may be on private property to aid in identifying and counting colony cats. At persistent colony locations, the District may post signage and provide the address of the nearest shelter location or engage directly with the property owner to cease the feeding of free-roaming cats. The District will determine the need to have animal service agencies staff or animal control officers train District staff in the most humane and effective trapping techniques and the possible need to purchase additional equipment.

#### Other Non-Lethal Capture Methods

Free-roaming cats that have already been captured in traps can be difficult to recapture. Every effort will be made to coordinate with animal services agencies and colony caretakers so they understand that cats near sensitive habitats should not be released back to colonies. In situations where the traditional method of baited live-trapping does not work, other options will be considered. Tranquilizer guns seem like an ideal tool but must be used by highly-trained professionals and under specific conditions. The sedative is a controlled substance and the level of sedative needs to be carefully calibrated to the animal's size and estimated weight. Because the target region on the cat's body is small, there is danger of injuring the cat with a projectile dart and not achieving sedation. In addition, the cat must be tracked until the sedative takes effect. These conditions may not always be met under nighttime conditions nor dense marsh vegetation where there is added danger of a sedated cat drowning. As technologies for animal capture advance, new methods will be reviewed in collaboration with animal services agencies.

#### Restrictions on Lethal Control

The District is optimistic that with significant efforts into education, prevention, and collaboration, the need to use lethal control will be significantly diminished or even eliminated. However, there may be extreme situations when the threat to a critically endangered species is imminent and all other options have been exhausted. An example of such a situation would be when trapping is not successful for a small number of untrappable cats that are foraging in the marsh or shoreline during the peak of nesting bird season or accessing a nesting colony of breeding California least terns or western snowy plovers.

To further restrict the use of lethal control, the draft Policy provides that lethal control may only be used in parks where federally or state protected species are known to occur and are at risk

from predation by free-roaming cats. Currently, the following threatened species are known to occur in regional parks and are known to be at risk from free-roaming cats:

- California Ridgway's rail,
- western snowy plover,
- California least tern, and
- salt marsh harvest mouse.

These species occur in most of the District's shoreline parks, in isolated fragments of marsh that are habitat "islands" bordered by water or urbanization. (See Attachment D for a map.) In the rare and unavoidable situation that lethal removal as a last resort cannot be avoided, the draft Policy further provides that lethal removal of free-roaming cats will not be conducted by District staff but by external agency partners with appropriate expertise and certifications.

In addition, the Program provides that no lethal removal will occur without prior coordination with animal service agencies, nor until education, relocation and trapping efforts have been attempted, and then only in areas of sensitive habitat where protected, listed species are known to be at risk from cat predation. This method is considered a humane form of euthanasia: "Given the need to minimize stress induced by handling and human contact, gunshot may be the most practical and logical method of euthanasia for wild or free-roaming species (AVMA 2020)."

#### Enforcement of Prohibitions on Abandonment or Feeding of Free-roaming Cats

The District's Ordinance 38, *Rules and Regulations* does not allow dogs or cats in protected resource areas and prohibits abandonment or feeding of feral or wild animals in all parks. Similar provisions are included in the District's *Park Operating Guidelines*. The Policy specifies that park staff will notify unit managers and Stewardship staff of any observations of cats in sensitive habitat areas, or any increase in free-roaming cat populations in the parks.

Park staff often aid Public Safety with enforcement of these restrictions by noting violations of animal abandonment or feeding. Park staff can take a photo of the vehicle, the license plate number, and type of animal and color. District staff is also working with local animal services agencies to coordinate enforcement of municipal and county code restrictions on abandonment or feeding of feral cats.

#### Transparency and Reporting

As detailed in the attached Policy, District staff will prepare an annual report summarizing Free-roaming Cat Management Program actions. The report will include a description of education and prevention efforts, trapping and management efforts, any successful trapping and delivery to shelters, and lethal removal conducted by external agency partners, if any.

### RECOMMENDATION

Staff requests that the Natural and Cultural Resources Committee recommend that the Board of Directors adopt the attached Free-roaming Cat Management Policy as an update to the District's current program.

## References

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- US Geological Survey (USGS). (2021). Coastal Wetlands and Sediments of the San Francisco Bay System. <https://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/coastal-wetlands/>

## East Bay Regional Park District Free-roaming Cat Management Policy

February 2021

The East Bay Regional Park District’s mission is to preserve “a rich heritage of natural and cultural resources” while providing outdoor recreational opportunities to the millions of people that call the Bay Area home. Integral to preserving that rich heritage of natural resources is the protection of biodiversity, with special attention to protecting and encouraging the recovery of threatened or endangered native species that were once abundant in the East Bay.

Hundreds of native species that exist in the East Bay Regional Parks are protected by federal and state law. Of these, over a dozen animals such as the California Ridgway’s rail (*Rallus obsoletus obsoletus*) and the salt marsh harvest mouse (*Reithrodontomys raviventris*) are on the endangered species list and at significant risk of extinction. The protection of these species contribute to the biodiversity, ecological health, and unique evolutionary history of regional parks.

The shorelines of the East Bay are particularly critical, as rare birds and mammals live on isolated fragments of protected habitat between the urban edge and the bay waters. Over the years, significant public resources have been invested to protect these last remaining islands of refuge. Along with habitat loss, human encroachment creates other risks for endangered animals, including predation by non-native animals imported to the area either as pets or as game for hunting.

Management of domestic cats (*Felis catus*) within the Park District is challenging, as the domestic cat is both a beloved human pet and a lethal predator of endangered native animals. The District’s goal in enacting this Policy is to comply with federal and state laws that protect native, endangered species in regional parks by removing cats from sensitive habitats as humanely as possible. The Park District’s previous feral cat program recommendations were approved by the Board’s Natural and Cultural Resources Committee in 1999. This Free-Roaming Cat Management Policy (Policy) updates and replaces the 1999 program in order to add procedures aimed at improving collaboration, prevention, education, and transparency with the community the Park District serves.

### 1. Education and Prevention

The District will collaborate with local animal services agencies to develop and implement an educational campaign focused on the impact that abandoned and free-roaming cats have on endangered wildlife and the poor outcomes these cats face outdoors. The following are examples of efforts the District will undertake with local animal services agencies to educate the public on the importance of not abandoning cats or feeding free-roaming cats:

- a. Revise signs and replace or post new signs in parks where cats are likely to be abandoned.
- b. Revise and reissue informative brochures and distribute in kiosks and visitor-centers.
- c. Develop an internal educational program for staff regarding this program and best practices for managing abandoned or free-roaming cats.
- d. Develop an external educational program directed to all park users.
- e. Update the District’s website with a free-roaming cat page, including links to the nearest animal shelters and contact information for assistance.

- f. Where applicable, provide a link to the free-roaming cat page on the park websites that have the largest pet abandonment problems.

The District will evaluate the successes or failures of these programs and may add or expand on these educational programs as needed. At a minimum, the education and prevention efforts will be reviewed and revised by District staff every five years.

## **2. Coordination Meetings and Agreements with Animal Services Agencies**

The District will establish regular communication and meetings with the directors or managers of local animal service agencies. To continue this collaboration, the District will commit to:

- a. Quarterly meetings with animal service agencies, or more frequently if the District and animal service agencies are working together on active cat colony removal or other animal abandonment issues. During quarterly meetings, the District will note seasonally relevant dates in the upcoming months, for example, the start of breeding season or dates of expected king tides.
- b. The District and animal service agencies will collaborate to develop a long-term cooperative agreement for free-roaming cat management. The agreement may be reviewed by the parties every 5 years, or more frequently, if needed. The agreement will include a provision that animal services agencies will provide the first point-of-contact to caretakers to request their assistance with trapping and removal efforts. Animal service agencies, animal control officers, and cat caretakers are suitably equipped and experienced in trapping domestic animals and the District will work with them to ensure the highest success rate possible for trapping efforts.

## **3. Free-roaming Cats: Methods and Tracking for Locating Colonies and Removal**

Initial identification of free-roaming cat colonies and individual cats will occur in two ways:

- a. The District will issue a survey to all park offices, similar to the survey previously undertaken in 1999. The survey will ask if there are known cat colonies in areas where they may impact sensitive natural resources, the approximate location of any known colonies, the number of cats associated with each colony, and related questions. The results of these surveys will be aggregated, and with input from the animal services agencies the District's Chief of Stewardship will recommend where to prioritize colony management efforts.
- b. The District will establish a shared spreadsheet or similar system to track cat observations and cat colony locations. These data will be shared between District staff and animal service agency staff.
- c. These data on cat observations and cat colony locations will be maintained by Stewardship staff and updated by Park Operations staff as needed.

## **4. Free-Roaming Cats: Capture and Removal Methods**

- a. Trapping: The District will coordinate trapping efforts with local animal service agencies to conduct the outreach to colony caretakers to cease feeding and, if necessary, to help with trapping. The District will only trap on its properties. Trapping of cat colonies on private property will be handled by animal service agencies. Trap type, number, and duration of

trapping will be coordinated with the District's Park Supervisor, rangers, and District's Chief of Stewardship. The District will record and take detailed information on its trapping efforts. Within the first year of the approval of this Policy, the District will work with the animal service agencies to determine the best way to collaborate on trap-removal efforts. All trapped cats will be removed to animal service facilities with the goal to rehome or relocate.

- b. Other Non-Lethal Capture Methods: For cats that may be difficult to trap, the traditional method of baited live-trapping may not work. In this situation, the District will consult with professional animal control specialists on other non-lethal types of traps or trapping methods, particularly in cases where cats have become difficult or impossible to trap.
- c. Lethal Control: It is the District's goal that increased public education and collaboration with animal service agencies will decrease cat abandonment and feeding and increase trapping success such that the need for lethal control is eliminated or used only in rare cases. Lethal control will continue to be used only as a last resort, and only in areas of sensitive habitat where: 1. federally- or state-threatened species are present, and 2. those species are considered at-risk from free-roaming cat predation.

This is consistent with the ethical position statement from the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (2021):

*"When one species preys upon or competes with another to the point that a species is threatened or endangered, human intervention may be necessary. In such cases, the ASPCA advocates trapping and relocation and other humane methods of resolving the conflict; as a last resort, lethal means may be employed to protect the endangered species."*

Currently, the District considers any of the following four federally- or state- threatened or endangered species at-risk:

1. California Ridgway's rail,
2. western snowy plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus*),
3. California least tern (*Sternula antillarum browni*), and
4. salt marsh harvest mouse.

These species occur in most of our shoreline parks, in isolated fragments of marsh that are habitat "islands" bordered by water or urbanization. The District will increase education and trapping efforts particularly during critical nesting seasons when a free-roaming cat can inflict massive damage in a short time span or during high tide events such as king tides, when rapid action is needed to protect species as they are flooded out of the marsh into urban areas.

In the rare and unavoidable situation that lethal removal as a last resort cannot be avoided, lethal removal of free-roaming cats will not be conducted by District staff but by external agency partners with appropriate expertise and certifications. No lethal removal will occur without prior coordination with animal service agencies, nor until education, relocation and trapping efforts have been attempted, and then only in areas of sensitive habitat where the protected species listed above are known to be at risk from cat predation.

## **5. Consult with Animal Control Specialists Regarding Infrastructure and Deterrence**

The District will consult with animal control specialists to identify mitigation options in management practices and infrastructure to reduce nuisance attractions (e.g. employing animal-proof garbage receptacles, dumpsters) or employ predator exclusion fencing or other deterrence methods where appropriate.

## **6. Enforcement of Prohibitions on Abandonment or Feeding of Free-Roaming Cats**

Throughout District lands, the District has policies related to feeding cats or any animals, wildlife included. Violators are subject to citation by EBRPD Police. The only feeding allowed is baiting within cage traps. The Park District's current Ordinance 38 restricts the following actions (some sections paraphrased).

- a. Section 801.1: No dog, cat, or other animal, even if securely leashed, shall be permitted in Prohibited Areas, which includes designated nature study areas, wetlands or marsh areas.
- b. Section 801.2: All dogs, cats, or animals must be securely leashed and under control of a person in any Developed Area or within 200 feet of any parking lot, trail head or staging area.
- c. Section 802: No person shall abandon a dog, cat, fish, fowl, or other animal within the District parklands. Any abandoned animals will be live-trapped and relocated, or turned over to Animal Control, or otherwise be removed in compliance with adopted Board policy.
- d. Section 803: For Feral (Domestic or Non-Native Animals), Wild Animals, and Farm Animals. No person shall feed farm animals when so posted, or feral or wild animals at any time on District parklands.

This Policy supplements Section 8 of Park Operating Guidelines, which directs park staff to remove all feeding stations and trap and remove free-roaming cats (EBRPD 2003). Park staff will aid with enforcement by noting violations of animal abandonment or feeding. Park staff may take a photo of the vehicle, the license plate number, and type of animal and color. If the abandoned animal seems tame or friendly, it may be dropped off at a local shelter or sheltered until animal service agencies are contacted. Park staff will notify the appropriate Unit Manager and District biologists when any cats are observed in shoreline parks or when any increase in free-roaming cat populations is observed.

In areas where municipal codes prohibit abandonment or feeding, the District will work with local jurisdictions to enforce feeding and abandonment restrictions. For example, in the City of Fremont, abandonment and feeding of animals is prohibited on posted property.

This Free-Roaming Cat Management Policy does not supersede any part of EBRPD Policy 820, which establishes guidelines for animal control officers and East Bay Regional Park District Police Department personnel in dealing with animal control related calls for service (EBRPD Police Policy Manual).

## **7. Transparency and Reporting**

Each year, the District will prepare an annual summary memo. The memo will state briefly, the efforts expended each year:

1. Brief description of education and abandonment prevention campaigns,
2. Regional parks where cat management occurred,
3. Extent of trapping efforts,
4. How many cats were trapped, and
5. If lethal control was conducted, by whom, circumstances leading up to control, and number. A report prepared by contractors may be appended to the annual summary report.

The report will cover a calendar year and be available by request around the end of February each year. To support reporting, data will be collected on cats observed, trapping efforts, and a brief but thorough drop-off checklist will be created to fill out if District staff surrender animals at a shelter drop-box. Annual updates may be requested by the Natural and Cultural Resources Committee.

### References

ASPCA (2021). Policy and Position Statements: Endangered Species.  
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## ATTACHMENT A

### **CALIFORNIA RIDGWAY'S RAIL (Federally Endangered, State Endangered)**

Ridgway's rails (formerly known as California clapper rails) are restricted to salt or brackish marshes that were once widely distributed along bay coastlines. Commensurate with the decline in habitat, these birds are no longer common, only occurring in small remnant populations throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. These secretive birds depend on dense marsh vegetation to hide from predators and are particularly vulnerable to predation during high tide events when they are flushed out of the marsh into upland edges (Overton et al. 2016). Rail chicks and young birds are also highly vulnerable to predators. Rails generally breed from mid-February through the spring with some pairs attempting a second nest later in the season from early- to mid-summer (USFWS 2013). Free-roaming cats have been documented preying on Ridgway's rails (Cassaza et al. 2016).

### **WESTERN SNOWY PLOVER (Federally Threatened)**

Western snowy plovers are diminutive shorebirds that breed on sandy beaches, graveled river bars, and similar open habitats. They generally breed from March to September. Their nests, constructed by the male, is simply a scrape or depression lined with a layer of vegetation or debris. The speckled eggs are well-camouflaged (USFWS 2007). Free-roaming cats are known to prey on snowy plovers and are especially an issue where homes and urbanization are in close proximity to the birds' habitats (USFWS 2007).

### **CALIFORNIA LEAST TERN (Federally Endangered, State Endangered)**

Least terns are the smallest North American tern and nest in colonies along open beaches, initiating breeding in April or May. Their breeding behavior of establishing colonies where up to 25 pairs nest make them extremely vulnerable to predation (USFWS 2006). Both fledglings and adults are prey for free-roaming cats.

### **SALT MARSH HARVEST MOUSE (Federally Endangered, State Endangered)**

Salt marsh harvest mice are tiny, rufous-colored habitat specialists. They are classically associated with pickleweed (*Salicornia pacifica*), though recent research has revealed that they may use habitats dominated by other salt-adapted vegetation (USFWS 2013). There are no studies that document cats preying on salt marsh harvest mice but it is reasonable to suspect that free-roaming cats in areas of occupied habitat pose a threat to this species (USFWS 2013).

### **Federal Recovery Plans applicable to regional parks:**

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. (2006). California Least Tern (*Sternula antillarum browni*) 5-Year Review Summary and Evaluation. Carlsbad Fish and Wildlife Office, Carlsbad, California.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. (2007). Recovery Plan for the Pacific Coast Population of the Western Snowy Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus*). In 2 volumes. Sacramento, California. xiv + 751 pages.
- US Fish and Wildlife Service. (2013). Recovery Plan for Tidal Marsh Ecosystems of Northern and Central California. Sacramento, California. xviii+605pp.

## Attachment A References

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US Fish and Wildlife Service. (2013). Recovery Plan for Tidal Marsh Ecosystems of Northern and Central California. Sacramento, California. xviii+605pp.

**Attachment B. Posted Signs Discouraging Feeding and Abandonment**



## Attachment C. Informational Brochure

Our mission is to help all special status species keep their foothold in the East Bay

The East Bay Regional Park District protects and maintains more than 113,000 acres of parks and trails in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. The parks provide critical wildlife habitat for more than 500 species of wildlife. Many different forms of wildlife live in your Regional Parks. Golden Eagles soar overhead and ground squirrels scamper across the grasslands.

It is our responsibility to care for and manage wildlife for our enjoyment, and for future generations to enjoy.



Juvenile western snowy plover

Photo: Jerry Ting



Western skink

Photo: Dave Renschler

The East Bay Regional Park District is a system of beautiful public parks and trails in Alameda and Contra Costa counties east of San Francisco. The system comprises over 113,000 acres in 65 parks including over 1,200 miles of trails for hiking, biking, horseback riding and nature study.

Our mission is to manage and maintain a high quality, diverse system of interconnected parklands which balances public usage and education programs with protection and preservation of our natural and cultural resources.

**For Park information** visit the East Bay Regional Park District website [www.ebparks.org](http://www.ebparks.org) or call 1-888-EBPARKS (1-888-327-2757).

**For wildlife related information**, and to report cats or feeding sites, call:

East Bay Regional Park District  
Stewardship Department  
510-544-2340

East Bay   
Regional Park District

2950 Peralta Oaks Court, Oakland, CA 94605  
1-888-EBPARKS • [www.ebparks.org](http://www.ebparks.org)

East Bay   
Regional Park District  
[www.ebparks.org](http://www.ebparks.org)



Photo: Steven Bobzien

## Wildlife Protection and Free-Ranging Cats

Healthy Parks   
Healthy People



Photo: John Takekawa

*Salt marsh harvest mouse*

## Endangered Species

The rich abundance and diversity of wildlife in our parks include some whose numbers are dangerously low.

Special status species are rare, restricted in distribution and declining throughout their range.

More than 60 special status species are protected by law in the parks. The mystery, magic and wildness of these birds and animals add quality to our lives and enrich our time in nature.

More than two dozen species such as the red-legged frog, Alameda whip snake, salt marsh harvest mouse and California clapper rail are on the endangered species list and are at risk of extinction in the Bay Area. These are protected by federal and state laws.

The Park District stewardship staff monitors these and other wildlife species, and strives to maintain a healthy ecosystem. To protect wildlife, free-ranging cat colonies (also called feral cats) are not permitted on District property.



Photo: Dave Renschke

*Western snowy plover chicks*

## Wildlife Management

Our native birds and wildlife face many obstacles: habitat loss, pollution, and the impacts from exotic species. After habitat loss, the introduction of non-native species is the leading cause of extinction. Free-ranging cats that are descendants of the wild cats of Africa and Southwestern Asia are having a significant impact on our local wildlife. The free-ranging cat hunts because of its natural hunting instinct.



Photo: Jerry Ting

*Clapper rail*

## Free-ranging Cats' Impact on Wildlife

Extensive studies of the feeding habits of free-ranging cats over 50 years and on four continents indicate that small mammals (rodents, rabbits) make up 70% of the cats' prey, while birds make up 20%. The remaining 10% are a variety of other animals reflecting the food that is locally available (lizards, snakes, and insects). Nationwide, cats kill more than a billion small mammals and hundreds of millions of birds each year. Free-ranging cats are exposed to diseases, parasites and wounds from animal attacks, and they also transmit diseases to wild animals, domestic pets, and humans.



Photo: Joe DiDonato

*Red-legged frog*



Photo: Jillian Rose

*Least tern chick and adult tern decoy*

## What You Can Do to Help

Do not let your cat roam free in the Regional Parks. An indoor cat can live for more than 17 years, but an outdoor cat rarely survives past five years.

Support the removal of feral or free-ranging cats from natural areas – important habitat for native wildlife that live in the parks.

Don't dispose of unwanted cats by releasing them into parks. Be responsible by taking them to an animal control facility, or contact a cat adoption group.

Eliminate outdoor sources of food such as outdoor pet dishes and garbage which attract stray cats and other animals.

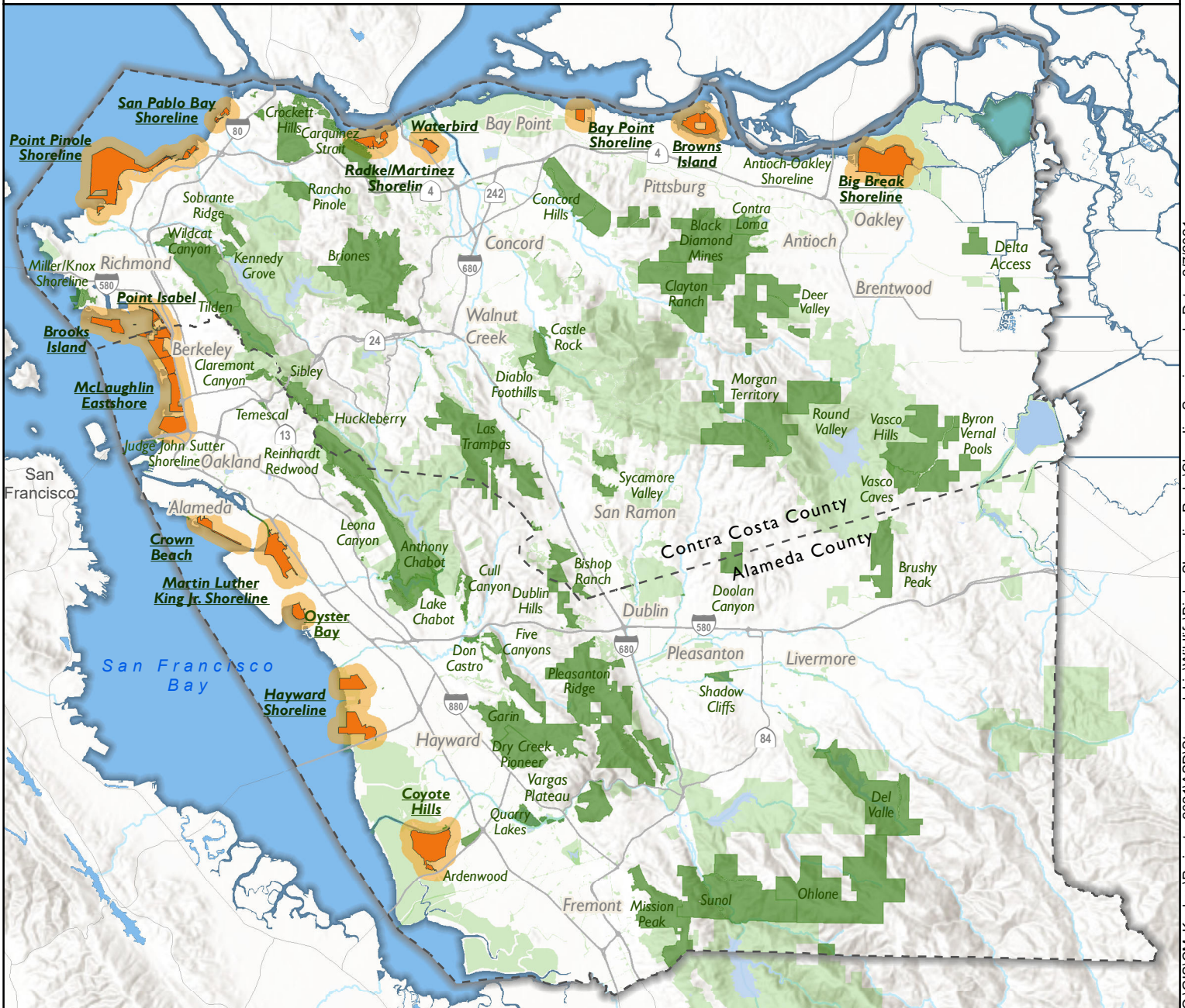
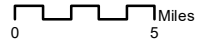
Do not feed or release stray cats in the Regional Parks. It is a violation of East Bay Regional Park District Ordinance 38, punishable by fines.

Report any cats or cat feeding sites to your local park staff or the Park District's Stewardship Department.



# Attachment D East Bay Regional Park District

California Least Tern, Ridgway's Rail, Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse, Western Snowy Plover



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### Shoreline Parks with California Least Tern, Ridgway's Rail, Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse, or Western Snowy Plover

- SPECIES PRESENT
- 1/2 MILE BUFFER AROUND PARK
- EBRPD LAND
- OTHER OPEN SPACE

PARK NAME	CALIFORNIA LEAST TERN	RIDGWAY'S RAIL	SALT MARSH HARVEST MOUSE	WESTERN SNOWY PLOVER
Bay Point Regional Shoreline	---	---	Yes	---
Big Break Regional Shoreline	---	---	Yes	---
Brooks Island Regional Preserve	Yes	---	---	Yes
Browns Island Regional Preserve	---	---	Yes	---
Coyote Hills Regional Park	---	---	Yes	---
Radke/Martinez Regional Shoreline	---	Yes	Yes	---
Robert W. Crown Memorial State Beach	---	Yes	---	Yes
Hayward Regional Shoreline	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Martin Luther King Jr. Regional Shoreline	---	Yes	Yes	Yes
McLaughlin Eastshore State Park	---	Yes	Yes	---
North Richmond Regional Shoreline	---	Yes	Yes	---
Oyster Bay Regional Shoreline	---	Yes	Yes	---
Point Isabel Regional Shoreline	---	Yes	Yes	---
Point Pinole Regional Shoreline	---	Yes	Yes	---
San Pablo Bay Regional Shoreline	---	Yes	Yes	---
Waterbird Regional Park	---	---	Yes	---