



COLLEGE OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE, POLICY, AND MANAGEMENT  
145 MULFORD HALL

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94720  
(510) 642-3765 FAX (510) 643-5438

18 October 1993

Mayor Loni Hancock and the City Council  
c/o City Clerk  
2180 Milvia St.  
Berkeley CA 94704

Dear Mayor Hancock:

I am a wildlife biologist currently lecturing in the Department of Environmental Science, Policy, and Management at the University of California, Berkeley. I have conducted wildlife research and consulted on wildlife issues in the San Francisco Bay Area and throughout California. Recently, Ms. Catherine Courtenaze of a local citizen's group advocating unleashed dog access to Berkeley's North Waterfront Park contacted me and requested that I look at the park and assess its value as wildlife habitat. She related the current controversy regarding dogs in the park and wondered if some of the claims regarding wildlife in the park and the effects of dogs on it were being exaggerated. I was somewhat familiar with the issue, being a Sierra Club member and having seen a few references to it in the Yodeler. I agreed to look at the area and write a letter relating my opinions on the wildlife-dog issue, which I feel is within my area of expertise. My motivation is to try to use whatever expertise I possess to assist in identifying those issues of importance, and to eliminate the unimportant. I have no personal interest in the issue, and received no remuneration.

I visited the park on 9 October 1993 to look at the types of wildlife habitats present. I understand that it is a capped landfill. Ecologically, the area is quite simple. The southern part of the park is lawn; the northern part is comprised largely of exotic grasses and weedy shrubs, which were dead and brown at this season. These habitat types are common in the Bay Area, and are not usually associated with a rich, diverse biota or with wildlife of particular conservation concern, such as endangered species or winter migrants. In the San Francisco Bay, habitats of greatest importance for wildlife are typically wetlands: salt marsh for clapper rails and salt marsh harvest mice, mud flats for migratory shorebirds, and open water for waterfowl. Uncontrolled dogs could have serious impacts on such areas. Lawns are of low value for wildlife; weedy fields are somewhat better, but are still not in short supply. They provide habitat for few species aside from some common finches and sparrows and

small mammals such as pocket gophers and mice. Burrowing owls are the only species I can think of that conceivably could use the area that would be of particular concern; I have no reason to think that they are present.

In my admittedly cursory field trip, I saw nothing in the weedy area of the north part of the park to make me think that unleashed dogs would have a substantial negative effect on any wildlife of concern. In sum, my impression of the North Waterfront Park is that it provides low-quality wildlife habitat, and is probably used largely by common species adapted to human-dominated landscapes and exotic vegetation. Any effects of dogs upon the wildlife that does use the area would be trivial.

I hope your policy debate concentrates on other, potentially more substantive issues. We have important wildlife issues in the Bay Area and California; I don't think that dogs in Waterfront Park is one of them, and using wildlife concern as a surrogate for other issues does wildlife a disservice.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,



Thomas E. Kucera, Ph.D.  
Lecturer

cc: Catherine Courtenaze, AARF ✓  
2112 Eunice Street  
Berkeley, CA 94709