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San Francisco Bay Chapter

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March 26, 2002

Eastshore State Park Planning Team
101 The Embarcadero, Suite 210
San Francisco, CA 94105

Re: Comments on the Eastshore State Park Concept Plan

Dear Planning Team:

The Sierra Club submits the following comments on the Concept Plan for the Eastshore State Park.

The Eastshore State Park has the promise to be a unique urban park. The Club's vision, shared by Save the Bay, CESP, and Golden Gate Audubon Society is for a new kind of urban park, one that brings the experience of wildlife and habitat protection to the front door of the East Bay without sacrificing compatible recreational activities. For that reason the Club is a sponsor of the Conservation and Habitat Restoration Plan for this park. We request that the planners chose the Conservation and Habitat Restoration Plan as the Preferred Plan for the Eastshore State Park.

In addition, the Club has the following comments to make about the proposed uses for the Eastshore State Park.

We applaud the plan's protection for the Emeryville Crescent, Albany Mudflats and Hoffman Marsh. Of course, it should be remembered that the Emeryville Crescent and Albany Mudflats area already protected under the exercise of the public trust that the people of the East Bay and the communities of Emeryville and Albany insisted the trustees undertake to protect these lands.

Turning to the Berkeley Beach, we do not understand why the planners propose no public access to the long expanse of the Berkeley Beach from Ashby to the Brickyard. This is an area that should be open to beach access and use, as it was before the No Parking signs went up just recently. The plan should show what use and access will be allowed in this long stretch of the new park.

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Office: 2530 San Pablo Ave., Suite I, Berkeley, CA 94702
Bookstore: 6014 College Avenue, Oakland, CA 94618

Tel. (510) 848-0800
Tel. (510) 658-7470

E-mail: san-francisco-bay.chapter@sierraclub.org
E-mail: info@sierraclubbookstore.com



Turning to the Brickyard, we support the opening up of the creek and creation of buffer zones, but are dismayed that a Promenade is proposed right by a critical habitat area for waterfowl. We are even more dismayed and astounded that water access is proposed at the small cove just West of the Frontage Road. This is a critical habitat area that should be off limits to all but the most limited boating activity. It is also an area that even in high tide is so shallow as to be worthless for boating.

As for the Berkeley Meadow, the Club continues to express its utter and complete opposition to the proposed recreation uses on the Western edge of the Meadow. Since the 1960's we have worked to save the Meadow as wildlife habitat in its entirety. It has become the home of many birds. People have observed Burrowing Owls, Harriers, and other raptors in the Meadow. Moreover, the consistent theme from all the planning sessions is that the supramajority of people who attended planning meetings did not want anything on the Meadow. I can think of only one person, Paul Kamen, who has advocated what you propose for the western edge of the Meadow. Mr. Kamen does not speak for the 20,000 East Bay members of the Club, as I do. Nor does he speak for 3,000 East Bay members of Golden Gate Audubon Society as Arthur Feinstein does.

We are even more distressed that the planners still refuse to acknowledge the existence of the Harrier nest site in the area where parking lots, boat launch ramp, a youth hostel, and other recreational uses are proposed. Respected members of the Club and Golden Gate Audubon Society have reported this site to the planning team. Yet, the planning team has failed to acknowledge this fact. Instead, we are told that the planners are still searching for proof of the nest site. The Sierra Club simply cannot and **will not** support a park plan that includes the amount of intensive recreational development and uses such as asphalt parking lots on the Meadow.

Moreover, we question why the planners have not identified **underutilized** areas of the Berkeley Marina for the very uses proposed for the western edge of the Meadow. Having attended Berkeley Waterfront Commission meetings, I know that the Berkeley Marina is underutilized for boat launch activities. The parking lots are not full, and the Dock of the Bay building has stood empty for close to 20 years. Why not indicate that the Berkeley Marina and the Dock of the Bay building would be an excellent location for the development proposed for the western edge of the Meadow? Dock of the Bay would be an excellent youth hostel.

The Club does support the protection of the Meadow as a Conservation area and carefully crafted access rules to the area.

The proposed uses for the North Basin Cove should send a shudder down the backs of any duck which relies on that Cove for resting and rafting. The plan identifies this area as an intensive recreational area, despite the fact that ducks and other waterfowl use the Cove to recuperate and rest on their North-South migration. The loss of this habitat in the East Bay will be devastating to these species, which are already in precipitous decline all across North America. It is inconceivable that the planners

propose destruction of this habitat, again with justifications that any loss will be "mitigated."

The Club does support the opening up of the Schoolhouse creek, the development a naturalized shoreline, and the uses proposed for the North Basin Strip except for the proposed water access, which would have severe negative impacts on waterfowl in the period from November to April.

The Albany lands present another lost opportunity. While the Club supports the designation of the Albany Bulb and Neck as a Conservation Area, the proposed turfed and structured sports fields for the Albany Plateau is an inappropriate use for that area. The Plateau has developed into a rich habitat area that is a critical buffer in its totality for the Albany Mudflats. While passive recreational use on the Plateau is acceptable, the development of turfed sports fields that will require fertilizers and herbicides to maintain them will be devastating to the wildlife. Moreover, we are very concerned that once these fields are constructed, the demand will be for night games with lights. The impact from light on wildlife is a major environment problem, yet the plan is mum as to whether this will be prohibited or will actually be part of the sports field complex.

In regards to Parking, we again point out that the plan fails to look to areas adjacent to the park for this use. The Golden Gate Fields parking areas are seas of asphalt that are not used. These areas should be leased or bought from the track for parking, if that parking is necessary. The plan should not call for building more parking lots where we have so much asphalt already.

The Club supports the plan's proposed establishment of the Albany Bulb and Neck as a Conservation area with limited access and no car access.

We are equally disappointed with the failure to protect the Battery Point and to turn it over to unleashed dog use. This area is a critical buffer zone for wildlife in the water and wetlands adjacent to it. The Battery Point should be a buffer zone and not open to intensive recreational use.

As for off-leash dogs, we do not oppose the continued use of Point Isabel as an off leash dog park area, just as we supported the off-leash dog park in Cesar Chavez Park in Berkeley. We support a ban on off leash dogs in all other areas of the park. We do feel that in certain areas dogs on leash are acceptable so long as it is demonstrated to a reasonable scientific certainty that leashed dogs will not significantly impact wildlife and habitat.

The Club remains concerned that the planners still fail to acknowledge bird watching and educational programs on wildlife and habitat as recreational use.

On numerous occasions in the past the Sierra Club and Golden Gate Audubon Society have made it unequivocally clear that the Meadow and the Albany Bulb must remain as protected wildlife areas with the allowance for some human access for their use

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and enjoyment. Planning for this park will be a much more pleasant experience for all of us if the planners understand that the Club's and Audubon's position on these two areas is a "core" issue and adjust the plan accordingly.

We urge the planners to make changes to the concept plan so that we can have a plan that will enjoy wide spread support in the community and be a true consensus plan.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Norman La Force". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Norman La Force, Chair
Sierra Club East Bay Public Land Committee
and General Counsel for the Chapter