Nature program wasting millions to kill trees

By Quentin L. Kopp

San Francisco likes to proclaim it leads the way in environmental sensitivity.

Imagine, a metropolitan city with too few trees wastes precious millions of taxpayer dollars to demolish thousands of trees in its parks, targeting eucalyptus trees as its main offending species.

An accountable bureaucracy operating in secrecy and defying science perpetrates all this. In a messianic zeal to fix that which isn’t broken, city government bureaucrats spend millions of dollars and employ sham science, all to destroy greenery our city’s founding fathers wisely planted.

The Recreation and Park Department’s Natural Areas Program started in 1985 to preserve small remnants of native vegetation in our compact 48-square-mile city. It was a program most people could logically support. That support has vanished.

Instead of preservation, this program would abolish existing habitats, landscapes and recreational uses in order to introduce native plant museums. In so-called natural areas, it will be forbidden to leave the trail. Children won’t be allowed to explore or collect leaves or flowers. Pets must be leashed. No ballgames, no chasing butterflies, no picking blackberries will be permitted. Much of the department planting dies because it’s not maintained.

Even successful native landscapes turn brown and lie dormant for many months of the year. The NAP encompasses 42 areas and 1,600 acres, about one-third of all city parkland. In some smaller parks, the entire park constitutes a so-called natural area and thus is unavailable for active recreation.

Embarking upon a heedless quest to convert those lands to pre-1769 shrubbery and grassland, NAP managers will use some of the most toxic herbicides San Francisco permits on its properties. The Sig-nificant Natural Resources Areas Management Plan, currently in the environmental impact report process, includes the following act: destroying about 18,500 healthy trees, including 1,000 on Mount Davidson, eliminating 9 miles of trails and closing 19 acres of dog-play areas. To implement the program, NAP requires an increase in herbicide use to destroy non-native vegetation and kill the roots of the trees so they don’t re-sprout.

Eucalyptuses are large, with dense wood, fast-growing but long-lived, possessing a lifespan of 300 to 500 years. Other than reducing our carbon emissions, preserving our trees constitutes probably the best single way to fight global warming. Instead, NAP would eliminate them, replacing their stored carbon as the trees are chipped and left to rot.

The program will cost millions of taxpayer dollars. It’s difficult to calculate how many millions, because City Hall data are unclear, and funding emanates from many sources. Operational costs alone are $8.5 million annually, not counting extensive separate payments to loggers.

Meanwhile, the department has reduced programs that served the public, abandoned neighborhood parks without the gardeners who tended them, and shuttered recreation centers because they couldn’t find, for example, even $50,000 annually to pay a part-time director.

Consultants’ fees for preparing the management plan and environmental impact report already total nearly $2 million, but the process is not over yet. Should the management plan receive City Hall approval, its costs will soar exponentially.

If James Watt were still in office, most San Francisco officeholders would scramble bloody murder if he tried to annihilate trees in our national parks. But the Natural Areas Program under execution in environmentally observant San Francisco is something President Ronald Reagan’s former interior secretary might enjoy.

Let’s stop it now, and spend money prudently on beneficial environmental and recreational activity. Contact the San Francisco Forest Alliance (www.sfforest.net) if you want to get involved or need more information.

Quentin L. Kopp is a former Board of Supervisors member, state senator and Superior Court judge.

FROM READERS

“Vote yes on Prop. B: Citizens deserve chance to be heard,” Editorial, Thursday

Hidden pitfalls to Prop. B

Nicely said. The San Francisco Examiner last week endorsed Proposition B without addressing either the probable loss of the Port of San Francisco’s $3.6 billion plan to restore itself nor the potential for developers to skip environmental impact reports if Prop. B passes.

Mike Zonta
San Francisco

“Schools overhauling safety policies,” Peninsula, Friday

Bullying is our real priority

The efforts to prevent sexual school shootings is commendable. But daily terrorism consists of bullying, which contributes to non-attendance at schools. At least 100,000 students are absent on a daily basis throughout the nation due to bullying. This also contributes to the sexual school shootings, where mentally tormented individuals are pushed over the edge and plan acts that take the lives of students and faculty. This must also be addressed because students are subjected to daily fear, which impairs academic performance and, more significantly, peace of mind.

Herbert J. Weiner
San Francisco

Wal-Mart visit a misstep

Wal-Mart is one of only a few major retailers that have refused to sign on to new safety standards that came out after a garment factory collapsed last year in Bangladesh, killing 1,129 people.

Despite a spotty record on labor issues, President Barack Obama’s visit Friday to the Wal-Mart in Mountain View was the first by a sitting president to a Wal-Mart store — the world’s largest retailer. It raised the ire of some labor advocates who have long criticized the retailer for low wages and importing goods from China rather than buying from U.S. manufacturers.

They protested alongside environmentalists demanding a halt to the Keystone XL pipeline on a street outside the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco on Thursday.

Ted Rudoe III
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