

Bond measure will help preserve district open space

By Ned MacKay

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It's official. East Bay Regional Park District directors have taken the final step to place a measure on the November ballot that would extend the life of Measure AA, the 1988 bond issue that enabled the acquisition and preservation of about 34,000 acres of new parkland.

Directors voted unanimously for the measure at their July 15 meeting. Its ballot designation has not yet been determined, but it's unlikely to be "AA." However it's named, here's a summary:

The new measure would not increase the district's tax above the present maximum rate of \$10 per \$100,000 of assessed valuation. It represents a continuation of the Measure AA program. So a home assessed at \$400,000 would pay \$40 per year.

The amount sought is \$500 million. Passage requires approval by two-thirds of the voters in Alameda and Contra Costa counties. Livermore area voters are not part of the tax extension, because they were not part of the East Bay Regional Park District at the time of the original Measure AA.

The bonds would be sold in increments over a 30-year period. Seventy-five percent of the revenue, \$375 million, would fund regional park acquisitions, wildlife habitat preservation and parkland development. Of this sum, \$26.2 million would be held in reserve for unanticipated future needs and opportunities.

In a distribution similar to Measure AA's local grant program, \$125 million, or 25 percent, of the new bond's revenue would be provided to cities and park departments on a per capita population basis to fund their own community park and recreation projects. For example, Oakland would receive \$19 million, Richmond \$4.7 million and Hercules \$1.1 million. The Measure AA local grant program funded 235 such projects throughout the East Bay.

East Bay Regional Park District has compiled a draft list of projects that would be funded if the Measure AA extension is approved. The list can be viewed online at www.ebparks.org, or obtained by phoning 888-EBPARKS (327-2757), toll free.

The 1988 Measure AA bond issue was for \$225 million. The increase to \$500 million approximates the buying power of the original measure after 20 years of inflation. With the funds generated by Measure AA, the park district was able to create 17 new regional parklands and add more than 100 miles of trails. Moreover, by obtaining matching funds from public and private sources, the district was able to augment Measure AA with an additional \$160 million. Matching funds would be sought to leverage the new bond revenue as well.

It's the park district's view that the new bond measure is needed to preserve remaining East Bay open space and wildlife habitat in light of increasing population and demand for parks and open space.

More detailed information on the ballot measure can be found at www.ebparks.org.

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Worms are the word at the Tilden Nature Area in the Berkeley hills. From 2 to 3:30 p.m. Saturday the interpretive staff will lead a dig through garden compost to learn about a creature essential to

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gardeners. The group also will make worm homes to take home.

From 10:30 a.m. to noon Sunday a garden program is scheduled for children ages 3 to 5, accompanied by parents. Songs, stories, gardening, craft-making and a snack are all on the agenda.

Then from 2 to 3 p.m. Sunday, it will be reptile rendezvous time, showcasing some of the reptile residents of the nature area.

All three programs are free and registration isn't necessary. For details, call 510-525-2233.

Ned MacKay writes a regular column about East Bay Regional Park District sites and activities. E-mail him at nedmackay@comcast.net.

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