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**Northern Alameda County Group**

(Alameda-Albany-Berkeley-Emeryville-Oakland-Piedmont-San Leandro)

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June 6, 2012

**Re: Conversion of former Naval Air Station land to Wildlife Refuge in Alameda**

Dear Mayor Gilmore and Members of the City Council:

The Sierra Club's mission is to explore and protect natural places, and to protect open spaces. In Alameda, there is an opportunity to protect a wild place, the portion of the former Naval Air Station that is designated as a Wildlife Refuge, as habitat for the endangered California Least Tern.

As part of the solution to the "Wildlife Refuge" issue, the Sierra Club seeks to protect much of the "Northwest Territory" of the Naval Air Station, which is currently owned by the Federal Government but is scheduled to be transferred to the City, to fulfill the objectives of the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)'s biological opinion that identifies uses appropriate for the Northwest Territories to protect the Least Tern population. The FWS identified as an important use in the Northwest Territories the preservation or creation of grassland habitat. This is very much in keeping with the East Bay Regional Park District (Park District)'s proposal to create a regional park on the Northwest Territories.

Estimates demonstrate it will cost at least \$6 million to construct such a park (we recently heard that EBRPD increased their cost estimate.) The Sierra Club believes it is in the City's interest to accept a proposal from the Park District to take over the property. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) would be permitted to move its columbarium facility to the Naval Air Station, so this facility will remain in Alameda and continue to provide a valuable service to our veterans. The Park District would add to its portfolio of properties a premier site with views across the bay in Alameda. The Least Tern would be protected and bird enthusiasts (and their children) would be able to enjoy viewing and observing this protected bird for decades to come. The citizens of Alameda would gain a first-class park within easy access of all residents.

Our understanding is that negotiations broke down this spring due to disagreement over funding to pay for the land in question. Since the land in question needs capital improvements to be converted into a Park, and since East Bay Regional Park District is willing to make those capital improvements, thus releasing the City of a land management burden, the Sierra Club believes it is inappropriate for the City to demand that EBRPD use WW funds to purchase this land. We strongly urge you to approach the Park District once again with an open mind to negotiating a solution acceptable to the Park District, so that the property is maintained by East Bay Regional Parks.

Sincerely,  
Kent Lewandowski  
Group Chair, Northern Alameda Group  
San Francisco Bay Chapter