

Why should Pine Lake Park visitors be concerned about the Western Pond Turtle and other rare species?

The possible existence of a Western Pond Turtle could eliminate access to Pine Lake Park. The Western Pond Turtle (WPT) is currently a federally-listed Species of Special Concern. It has been proposed as a federally-listed Endangered Species. Special status species can lead to changes in park use. The RPD Natural Areas Program (NAP) reports that they have already planted a rare variety of the SF Gumplant, even though there is no historical record it ever grew at Pine Lake. Additionally, NAP is considering the introduction of another rare species, the Pacific Chorus Frog.

Natural Areas Program observers reported two sightings of a Western Pond Turtle in spring 2000. These sightings are controversial because historical scientific databases at the California Academy of Sciences indicate that the WPT does NOT exist in San Francisco. Additionally, biological surveys done after 2000 for another department (DPW) have failed to find the turtle. Any "sighting" might be a "turtle foot in the door" paving the way for a ban of recreational activities.

Where did the turtle come from?

IF there is a WPT at Pine Lake it is unlikely to have been born there. The WPT requires open, sunny, sandy areas for egg incubation and the shady eucalyptus trees have been standing for over 100 years. IF the WPT is there, it probably arrived at Pine Lake the same way the other turtle species did, i.e. acquired as a pet (perhaps found in Marin County or Santa Clara County) and later dumped into Pine Lake when it was no longer wanted.

How could the Endangered Species Act affect the Pine Lake Park experience?

NAP proposes these management actions to protect the Western Pond Turtle at Pine Lake:

- ✓ Non-native turtles will be removed. The red-eared sliders and spiny soft-shelled turtles that we enjoy watching would be removed because of a turtle that is rarely, if ever, seen.
- ✓ Neighborhood cats, raccoons and other potential predators could be trapped and removed.

Additionally, Federal and State Endangered Species Act regulations could force RPD to:

- ✓ Remove all trees to create a sunny and sandy area for nesting habitat for the WPT.
- ✓ Ban recreational access within 500 meters of the water (longer than five football fields) and put up fences surrounding routes and nesting sites.

Fort Funston park visitors lost access to over 20% of the park based on bad science. We know from experience that almost any excuse will do when it comes to kicking dogwalkers out of the park. The GGNRA biologist identified raptors and graffiti-writers as threats to the bank swallow, not dogwalkers. Don't let bad science fence another park.

What can you do? Comment in the form of an email or letter to the Mayor, Board of Supervisors, SFRPD NAP management and the SFRP Commission. An email template is available at <http://naprap.home.mindspring.com/id7.html>

Give SPECIFIC comments and tell the Natural Areas Program:

1. **All claims that the Western Pond Turtle exists at Pine Lake should be removed from the NAP Management Plan until there is independent scientific confirmation. Even IF the WPT is found at Pine Lake, plans to "enhance the population of WPT" should be removed from the plan.**
2. **IF a Western Pond Turtle exists at Pine Lake, the turtle should be relocated to another site that provides a) a sunny open sandy area to provide appropriate nesting conditions, and b) a sufficient population of other Western Pond Turtles to provide the opportunity for mating and genetic diversity to insure a viable future.**
3. **Introductions of other rare species, such as the Pacific Chorus Frog and SF Gumplant, are inappropriate for a high-use urban park.**