Welcome to Vargas Plateau

This regional park, opened in 2017, provides magnificent views from its setting in the Fremont Hills. The plateau rises quickly and steeply from the bay plain to an elevation 1,000 feet above the streets below, overlooking Niles Canyon, Fremont, Union City, Newark, and the San Francisco Bay beyond. Atop the plateau a pastoral landscape predominates, and golden eagles, hawks, deer, bobcats, frogs, snakes, and a variety of other animals make their home in the open grasslands, ponds, and steep wooded canyons. These features, together with the Bay Area Ridge Trail along the ridgetop, make the park a great place for outdoor recreation and nature appreciation on the urban/wildland threshold.

HISTORY — The Ohlone-speaking Tuibun and Causen tribes thrived here in the Fremont Plains and Sunol Valley respectively, for many generations. Following the 1772 and 1776 arrival of Spanish expeditions, the native people lived and labored at Mission San Jose; and later, on Mexican land grants, which included land given to Juan B. Alvarado and Andres Pico in 1846, of which Vargas Plateau was part. With California statehood in 1850, the land was used as a horse-breeding ranch, and by the turn of the century it was subdivided. In 1909, Antonio F. Vargas purchased 444 acres of the “lower ranch,” and later, his brother Manuel and nephew Edward purchased 550 acres of the “upper ranch.” The Tavares family inherited Edward Vargas’ property in 1978. The families used the land for sheep and cattle ranching and dryland farming.

Between 1993 and 1996, the Park District purchased some of the Vargas and Tavares land, and added the Rose and Comcast properties in 2010, bringing the total acreage to 1,249 acres.

WILDLIFE — This parkland has a diverse array of wildlife habitats typical of the inner coast ranges, including grassland, seasonal wetlands, stock ponds, perennial and ephemeral drainages, northern coastal scrublands, and oak woodlands, with some low rock outcrops.

The parkland provides an important ridgetop link between ridgeline parks to the north and south (Garin, Pleasanton Ridge, Mission Peak, Sunol), which makes it an important corridor connecting habitats for threatened species, allowing genetic mixing between populations and encouraging their recovery.

The ponds in Vargas Plateau provide habitat for several special-status species, including the threatened California red-legged frog and the Alameda whip-snake, and for the federally threatened California tiger salamander.

Ground squirrels proliferate in the highest elevations of the plateau. Their burrow chambers may be inhabited by the California tiger salamander and the California red-legged frog, and by reptiles such as the Pacific gopher snake and the Northern Pacific rattlesnake. Many insects also utilize the burrows, including crickets, ants and beetles, which serve as food for non-breeding tiger salamanders. The ground squirrels’ presence, along with the California meadow vole, attracts a wide array of predators such as the white-tailed kite and Northern harrier.

Wetland habitats within Vargas Plateau include several ponds and seasonal wetlands. Upland, tributary drainages serve as the headwaters of various streams, all of which drain into Alameda Creek.

The dense stands of coast live oak interspersed California bay located in the drainages and on the plateau’s steep slopes support a wide array of species, including the gray fox, black-tailed deer, dusky-footed woodrat, red-tailed hawks, Cooper’s hawks, the great-horned owl and tiny pygmy owl, and wild turkeys.

The park’s steep topography has contributed to the plateau remaining somewhat isolated from major human encroachment, save for mostly agricultural uses such as ranching and dryland farming. This in turn has preserved the plateau’s integrity as a favored foraging area for golden eagles and other raptors, and for fan-ranging mammals such as coyotes, bobcats and mountain lions.

Year opened: 2016
Acres: 1,249
Highlights: Hiking, biking, equestrian trails, bird-watching, Bay Area Ridge Trail, panoramic views.

To Reach the Vargas Plateau Staging Area:
From I-680 in Fremont, exit at Vargas Road and go north. Drive about 1.6 miles to Morrison Canyon Road and turn right. The staging area is ahead on the left about 0.4 miles.

Rev 2/18

Jerry Ting

East Bay Regional Park District
2950 Fernald Oaks Court
Oakland, CA 94603-0381
1-888-327-2757 (1-888-EBPARKS)
www.ebparks.org
WELCOME!

Please enjoy the Regional Parks safely, and help protect and preserve parklands by complying with park rules and regulations.

SAFETY and ETIQUETTE

• Stay on trails. Taking shortcuts can be dangerous and causes erosion.
• Wading and/or swimming in undesignated areas may be dangerous and may harm the watershed.
• Carry and drink plenty of water. Dehydration is a leading cause of injuries on the trail.
• Be prepared for sudden changes in weather conditions.
• Trails can be slippery, rocky and steep. Proceed carefully at your own risk.
• Feeding or approaching wildlife is dangerous and illegal.
• Bicycles are permitted on designated trails only. Horses have the right-of-way on trails.
• Keep the parks beautiful. Pack out what you pack in.

RULES

• Dogs must be leashed 200 feet from any trail or park entrance. Dogs must be leashed in parking lots, picnic areas, developed areas such as lawns and play fields, and on some trails. They must be under voice control at all times.
• Drones are prohibited.
• Smoking is prohibited.

Visitors are responsible for knowing and complying with park rules (Ordinance 38). See www.ebparks.org/rules.

THE PARK IS ACCESSIBLE ONLY FROM THE I-680 VARGAS ROAD EXIT. NO PARK ACCESS FROM MISSION BLVD.