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**FRIENDS OF
KNOWLAND PARK**

OAKLAND ZOO SEEKS MORE OF KNOWLAND PARK—PROJECT SIZE NOW UP TO OVER 77 ACRES, ACCORDING TO NEW MAP. RALLY AT ZOO THIS SATURDAY TO PROTEST TAKING OF PUBLIC PARKLAND

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BREAKING: Friends of Knowland Park (FoKP) has learned that, in response to requirements set by the state and federal wildlife protection agencies that must grant “incidental take” (kill) permits in order for the Oakland Zoo to proceed with building its proposed new “conservation” themed complex, the zoo now proposes taking more of Knowland Park. According to a map sent to park defenders by Nik Dehejia, Chief Financial Officer of the zoo, the zoo is now proposing to take additional Knowland Park land both within and outside the current expansion footprint fence line and rezoned area to “mitigate” for its plan to use the most sensitive habitat in the Park for its planned aerial gondola ride, restaurant, offices and 34,000 square foot visitor center. However, according to Laura Baker of the California Native Plant Society, “The zoo isn’t purchasing mitigation credits from a bank as developers sometimes must do, but instead wants to take more free park land--something in the conservation world known as double-dipping--because the park land is already considered saved.”

The wildlife protection agencies did not accept the zoo’s claim that the impacts of constructing this development in the chosen location were only “temporary.” Rather, the impacts are deemed a permanent loss of habitat for the state and federally threatened Alameda Whipsnake.

This means that the effective size of the project has now grown from 56 acres to some 77 acres, according to Ruth Malone, Co-Chair of Friends of Knowland Park, which has been among numerous environmental groups opposing the project over the past seven years. “The bait and switch continues-- this is absolutely outrageous,” she said. “The bottom line is that the rubber stamping by the City of this disastrous project was short-sighted and none of the promises that the zoo made to the public can be kept. Had a full Environmental Impact Report ever been done--including careful, serious analyses of alternative plans and sites--the zoo and city would not be in this bind.”

Defenders of Knowland Park plan an Earth Day Rally at the zoo this Saturday, April 19 at the entrance to the Oakland zoo, Golf Links at Mountain Boulevard, 10 am-1 pm, featuring Country Joe McDonald. Also appearing will be Hali Hammer and Randy Berge and special surprise guest speakers. According to conservation groups opposing the project, the zoo’s goals of conservation education about native California could have been accomplished in a much less environmentally destructive way. The fact that the theme of the new exhibits is conservation education is especially galling to project opponents, who point out that loss of habitat is the single greatest threat to biodiversity and that the Park in its current state provides habitat for multiple wildlife species.

The group’s research has also found that the zoo has never honored the terms of its management agreement with the City of Oakland, including requirements for specific information as part of annual capital spending plan reports and oversight of contracts. “The City continues to award money to the zoo outside the normal budget process,” noted Baker. “We have also found irregularities in the amounts the zoo claims to need to build this project.” No East Bay conservation group supports the project.

More information about the rally and about the Park is available at www.saveknowland.org

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About Friends of Knowland Park (www.saveknowland.org)

Friends of Knowland Park is an association of environmentalists, neighborhood groups, and concerned citizens, brought together by the common wish to preserve and protect the natural resources of Knowland Park for future generations.