



# Friends of Lighthouse Field



May 25, 2009

Scott Wassmund  
Northern Division Chief for State Parks  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Chief Wassmund,

Friends of Lighthouse Field (FOLF) is an active community in Santa Cruz that has worked tirelessly for over five years to assure off-leash dog recreation at Its Beach and Lighthouse Field. For over 50 years (see [http://www.folf.org/issues/usage\\_survey.php](http://www.folf.org/issues/usage_survey.php)), the neighborhood residents of Santa Cruz have enjoyed off-leash recreation at Its Beach and Lighthouse Field. For 30 years, a City/State cooperative agreement affirmed this wonderful asset for the community. This solution provided a recreational resource that directly served the 40% of households with dogs, while also sharing this park with non-dog owners. Now, however, since off-leash recreation has been made illegal at Its Beach and Lighthouse Field, the park sits virtually unused through most of the day, while illegal camping, drinking parties, and gang presence have risen significantly. We are asking State Parks to develop a solution that brings the community back to the park and serves the community as a whole.

Since 2002, we have focused on park stewardship and political action to represent our community interests. Stewardship activities include frequent cleanup days, sponsorship of family-oriented social events at the park, fundraising for park amenities, such as benches, a drinking fountain, trail repair, and park-user education. We believe that a strong social network has formed among the park users, creating a vibrant community that would watch over the park. This community doesn't just enjoy the undeveloped beauty of the park and exercise with their dogs, but also highly values their interactions with the rest of the community.

For the past five years, we have met on numerous occasions with City, County and State government bodies, including local and State Parks officials, in an effort to represent this community. Our efforts have included proposals to offset costs associated with maintaining the park, and ideas, options and alternatives to help protect off-leash recreation.

The Santa Cruz City Council has stated on numerous occasions that it wishes off-leash recreation to continue. Previously, the City had exercised stewardship over the park for 30 years under an agreement with the State. State Parks refused to renew that agreement unless the City agreed to operate the park without off-leash recreation, which the City declined to do. Subsequently, legislation was passed that would enable Lighthouse Field State Beach to be sold to the City. However, this is not a cost the City can currently bear. As a result, the Santa Cruz community, as represented by the thousands of members of Friends of Lighthouse Field, largely avoid using Lighthouse Field, and under the fear of being cited, have carved out a two-hour period each Saturday morning to meet together with their dogs at Its Beach.

Lately, State Parks seems to be making a concerted enforcement effort to prevent previous park users from returning. This effort has included shutting down the park cleanup led by FOLF during Earth Day, on April 24, 2009. Currently, State Park rangers appear to be spending less time on pursuing real crime and vandalism at the Field and at Its Beach. The expulsion of our community has had extremely negative consequences. Because Lighthouse Field is an undeveloped area, it attracts vagrants, drink parties, drug users, gang activity, and other abusers of the park. As a result, both Lighthouse Field and Its Beach are currently both less safe and less clean, while at the same time consuming more State resources for law enforcement and maintenance. The key to having a safer and cleaner park is to have local citizens in the park.

The current situation at Lighthouse Field State Beach violates many State Park principles, including:

- Wastes State resources by having the wrong agency perform public safety and maintenance work. A central city park can clearly be managed more efficiently by city parks workers and city police.
- Overrides the expressed desires of the local community and their City Council in order to impose a bureaucratic edict that is not sensitive to local needs. Two years of public hearings and over 3,000 written statements of support showed an overwhelming preference for keeping things the way they were.
- Provides an undeserved reward for unwarranted manipulation of environmental laws. A few disgruntled individuals have gamed the system via litigation in order to achieve what they could not gain in an open democratic process. This litigation has been an important factor in the choices that have been made, giving them a handy excuse. The current result does not protect the environment. In fact, by expelling a protective user community and thereby opening the park to increased illegal camping, drink parties, drug usage, and gang activity, the park environment is being degraded.
- Discourages a community that has a long and successful history of augmenting public resources with their own volunteer time and resources.

The State of California is spending precious resources to enforce a policy that degrades quality of life in Santa Cruz. In the midst of the State's financial crisis, why are tax dollars being spent in order to make things worse rather than better? Here are two possible solutions:

- Open Lighthouse Field State Beach for limited off-leash recreation, based on 1) its unique urban location, 2) its 50+ year tradition of off-leash recreation, 3) the desire of the local government and 4) an engaged local community's stewardship and volunteer efforts.
- Resume negotiations to renew the previous operating agreement and allow the City to operate the park – with off-leash recreation allowed.
- At bare minimum until a lasting solution can be reached, direct State Park personnel to avoid issuing off-leash citations at Lighthouse Field and Its Beach from sunrise until 10 am and after 4 pm until sunset – the hours of off-leash recreation that were working fine for so many years.

On behalf of the over 3,000 people who have given us written statements of support, we are asking State Parks to find a compromise that arrives at a just and equitable solution, thus saving the State money and preserving this vibrant community.

Sincerely,

Bob Campbell  
Board of Directors, Friends of Lighthouse Field