

How Lighthouse Field is deteriorating after loss of City control

Documentation collected by Friends of Lighthouse Field Updated: 12/16/07

Problem: City no longer patrols. State Parks has limited resources. There is nothing to stop large parties with drinking, fires, dumping, and other kinds of abuse. If City police drove by, our understanding is that they don't have jurisdiction and they would do nothing.

Example report received: *[Via email 11/20/07]* "Last night around 5:15 pm *[Monday, November 19]* I went to the park to walk my dog and a party had started in the parking lot near the bathrooms. About 30 plus. After I walked my dog I came back to my car and the group had started a barbecue. Who will now monitor this? I am concerned about a fire and drinking etc."

Example reports received: *[Multiple verbal and email 12/02/07-12/03/07]* A large party was held in the willow area at the west end of the field. Lots of tables, chairs, benches, and other items were under the trees during the weekend. Much of this was still there on Monday morning. *[Note: This is the area that would have been protected as a preserved habitat under the new park general plan that was defeated by an anti-dog lawsuit.]*

Example reports received: *[Multiple verbal 12/07/07]* A car was driven wildly through the field sometime on 12/06. Many tire tracks from "doing donuts" etc. The car was abandoned in the trees at the west end of the field, and hauled away by State Parks personnel. *[Note: This is the area that would have been protected as a preserved habitat under the new park general plan that was defeated by an anti-dog lawsuit.]*

Example report received: *[Email 12/16/07]* "I live in the condo next to the field. I am not a dog owner, but a friend of dogs ... one enforcement ranger for the whole district from Wilder down to Manresa means threats by disturbed individuals and problems with mentally ill homeless will not be addressed adequately, without the involvement of the S.C. police. There is a homeless community gathering at the parking lot up from the beach stairs and also the parking lot around by the bathroom. ... The fights at night which I can hear from my bed were frightening..."

Problem: City workers used to clean out campsites so they did not become permanent. (E.g. mattresses, bags, etc.) City workers would also call police when necessary. State Parks does not have resources and camp sites are now left undisturbed. This will encourage a great increase in illegal camping.

Example report received: *[Via email 11/24/07]* "Thought you should know that it only took two weeks *[Note: actually, less than a week]* for people to start camping in the trees. There were three of them coming out of a group of trees by the bathrooms this morning talking about how they spent the night. Three guys, not the cleanest looking people all talking about how much "easier it is now." Since the only people around were maintenance ("we didn't see anything") I guess

we should have known it would happen. It was about 9 Sat morning, and the three gentlemen packed up their gear and went walking down the street towards town.”

Problem: Due to lack of resources, State Parks may not be able to keep the public restrooms open for as many hours as the City did. Combined with above-noted increase in illegal camping, we can expect an increase in the amount of human excrement in the park.

Example report received: *[Verbal report 11/21/07]* “The restrooms used to be unlocked by City workers around sunrise. I was in the park at 7:30am and they were still locked. If they’re closed, people are going to go somewhere, and this is going to be a problem.”

Example report received: *[Email 12/12/07]* “This past weekend (12/8), there was surfing contest at Steamers. The bathrooms were still locked at 8:45 am...the maintenance person was just getting there to clean and open them.”

Problem: Due to lack of resources, State Parks is unable to provide the same level of maintenance service. There may also still be confusion about who is responsible for certain maintenance.

Example reports received: *[Multiple verbal late Nov/early Dec]* Park users are reporting increases in bottles, trash and residue from parties and camping. Some users are taking personal initiative hauling such items to garbage cans. Some express worry about the possibility of confrontation with campers/partiers, as they have no backup from any authority.

Example report received: *[Email 12/07/07]* “I also notice a broken down microwave oven in the field and ... beer bottles.”

Example report received: *[Multiple verbal 12/09/07 – 12/11/07]* Garbage cans at the top of the Its Beach stairs were not emptied for several days – completely overflowing, refuse on sidewalk and blowing around.

Problem: City no longer patrols. State Parks rangers are the first to be dispatched for public safety problems. State Parks has limited resources – we understand there are only two on duty during any shift for the entire coastal area in Santa Cruz County. Response may be slow or non-existent.

Example report received: *[Verbal communication followed up by written report 12/06/07]* A woman called 9-1-1 in a threatening situation. The person responsible for the threat fled the scene. Park rangers declined to respond. (See below for additional details.)

Problem: As a result of the controversy triggered by the State’s attempted land use change pertaining to off-leash recreation, it appears that anti-dog agitators may be attempting to create phony incidents, make false reports, or harass people in the park.

Situation summary from FOLF email alert: [Sent 12/07/07]

There appears to be an effort underway to make phony claims about dog bites that never happened, and to harass people with dogs. So far the reports are isolated and fragmentary, but here's what we've been told by people in the Field:

- On Wednesday, Dec. 5, 2007, a man was riding a bicycle through the park, telling people they couldn't be there with their dogs. When a dog came near the bike, he started yelling that he had been bitten. (Eight witnesses confirmed he was not.) He also took out a camera and began photographing people and dogs.
- Later the same man was approached by a mild-mannered older woman whose dog he had accused. She wanted to find out what had actually happened. He became abusive, yelling expletives at her such as "f___ing bitch" and he then became so threatening that she called 9-1-1 for assistance. As she placed the call, the man fled the scene.
- Because Lighthouse Field is now under State Parks control, the 9-1-1 center routed the call to a State Parks ranger on duty. The woman was told that they would not be responding, since the threat had passed and dog issues were "political" so the ranger didn't want to be involved. The woman was surprised as she was calling to report a threat. She later made a report to Santa Cruz police.
- In another report, a man yelled at people that they had to leave, and then attempted to kick a passing dog, in what appeared to be an attempt to provoke an incident.
- In another report we heard that someone was using his cell phone and calling 9-1-1 to say "dogs are biting people at Lighthouse Field." (Again, no such thing was observed.)
- In another report from the previous week, a man was lurking under some trees with a camera photographing dogs and then shouting at people that the dogs shouldn't be there, and also photographing the people.

It is not clear from the reports how many people are involved or if these events are being organized and coordinated. So far only one report is properly documented in writing. [Note: as of 12/07/07]

Problem: If illegal camping, parties, drug use and other similar activities increase, and if the presence of the responsible community decreases, we can eventually expect the abusive users to also bring untrained, unlicensed, unneutered, uncontrolled dogs. Eventually this could lead to some kind of incident.

Report received: Thankfully *NONE* so far! However, we are concerned that any such incident will be exploited by the anti-dog faction, even though the circumstances that might make such an incident much more likely would actually be a *direct result of their actions* to drive out the ordinary community leaving the park in the hands of abusers.