



Friends of Lighthouse Field



November 15, 2009

Ruth Coleman
Director for State Parks
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Director Coleman,

Enclosed please find a petition from over 400 of our supporters requesting that you reinstate off-leash dog (voice command) recreation policies at Its Beach and Lighthouse Field in Santa Cruz County, to include off-leash hours before 10 am and after 4pm daily. We are requesting a special a Special Use Policy to Establish Amended Regulations for Dog Owner Recreation Purpose under State Code Title 14, Section 4312.

We believe that this Special Use Policy should be established for Lighthouse Field State Beach based on its very specific and unique characteristics (See Appendix A), including: 1) its unique urban location, 2) its 50+ year tradition of voice control/off leash recreation, 3) the desire of the local government and 4) an engaged local community's stewardship and volunteer efforts.

In addition to our signatures of support for this initiative, our community members have made pledges for yearly donations to the State Parks, totaling over \$32,000 if voice control recreation is reinstated. As we have communicated with Division Head Scott Wassman, this community has demonstrated several years of fund-raising experience and expertise including funding the purchase and installation of a fountain for Lighthouse field.

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), 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.

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,

Betsy Burton
Board of Directors, Friends of Lighthouse Field

CC;
Bill Monning Ca State Assemblyman
Scott Wassman Division Head for Northern CA State Parks
Cynthia Mathews Mayor Santa Cruz
Santa Cruz City Council

Appendix A: Lighthouse Field State Beach represents an atypical case

It is an accident of history that made this a State park rather than a City of Santa Cruz park. When Lighthouse Field was saved from development during the 70's, the community was seeking a way to create a City park that would be forever protected from development. The solution was to have the State acquire the land and the City of Santa Cruz to be responsible for all management of the park as part of the City parks system.

For the first 30 years of its existence (until the State takeover in November 2007) the City operated Lighthouse Field and Its Beach as a City park under an operating agreement, which was automatically renewable at the option of the parties. However a new State Parks policy forbidding recreation for people with off-leash dogs resulted in a decision that the State would run Lighthouse Field/Its Beach as a State Park for the first time.

California State Parks include parks and beaches of major scenic, ecological, cultural or historic importance. Parks units are typically large areas to protect significant areas. Smaller units are typically historic or cultural sites. State Parks manages 278 units comprising about 1,500,000 acres, or an average of about 5,400 acres per unit. State Parks manages 370 miles of ocean coastline. We can't find a list that specifies exactly which parks units are oceanfront units, but it appears that just over 100 units touch the ocean at some point. So the average oceanfront State Parks unit has more than 3-1/2 miles of shoreline.

Lighthouse Field is an urban park. At various times it has been a working farm, a set of holiday homes, a military base, and during the 60's and 70's an area in which large numbers of people drove cars to park and hang out. During this same time the park was often a dumping ground for discarded furniture and appliances. The surrounding neighborhoods have undergone intense development in recent decades, and the park has no wildlife corridors connecting it to larger undeveloped spaces. The only waterway in the park designated in the City's riparian corridor plan is the "Lighthouse Drain" which takes surface runoff water at Pelton Ave and channels it to a culvert under West Cliff Drive to the ocean. Much of the vegetation is non-native. The beach portion (Its Beach) has always been heavily used by the public, not only by people with dogs but also surfers, runners, sunbathers, dance and drumming circles, and many other recreational users. The cliff just above the beach has almost all non-native vegetation, a walking and cycling path, and a heavily traveled road.

Here are some characteristics that we think are appropriate to being a State Park and how LFSB fits or doesn't fit:

Typical State Park Characteristics	Lighthouse Field
Significant Historic Value	None There is some interesting local history but nothing of major historic significance. There are no cultural artifacts or remains, no historic buildings, no monuments, etc.
Wilderness Preservation Value	None It is not and will never again be a pristine wilderness, due to size and intense surrounding urban development.

Special or Unique Recreation	None There is no recreation opportunity that is uniquely adapted to the site and not widely available at numerous other nearby sites. (Except for traditional recreation for people with off-leash dogs, for which the space has proven to be ideal, but State Parks does not wish to manage such activities.)
Scenic Value	State Parks role unnecessary for preservation. The site is a beautiful oceanfront site, similar to any other undeveloped ocean front location. It has scenic value as part of the beauty of the California coastline, although it is far from being in the group of most notable or spectacular State parks. The scenic value would remain the same under City management. While it's true that LFSB has one of the last open headlands in a California urban area, Point Santa Cruz itself is actually City property and is already under City management.
Open Space Preservation	State Parks role unnecessary for preservation. The site is undeveloped and will remain so. Under an operating agreement, the City would not be allowed to develop the site, so no State Parks action or management is required to keep it that way.
Wildlife Preservation	Limited value due to small size and urban surroundings. Most notable is a small seasonal colony of Monarch butterflies which have arriving in the last couple of decades, utilizing a small non-native eucalyptus grove. City management would be as effective as State management in leaving the grove and other wildlife undisturbed. Public education (visitor center, etc.) is better served at nearby Natural Bridges State Beach. Wildlife will be impacted by urban environment and public access regardless of who manages it. The State Parks role adds no extra value for preservation.
Size	Abnormally small. At about 40 acres, it is one of the smallest State Parks units, especially excluding units devoted to historic buildings, cultural artifacts, museums or similar resources. The State-owned portion of the beach is about 1000 feet. State Parks undeveloped land parcels are almost always larger.