



The Wag

Summer 2015

GGNRA UPDATE: The End is Coming

The decades-long battle to preserve off-leash recreational access on the beaches and coastal trails of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) is reaching a critical point.

Sometime this summer or fall, the National Park Service will release a Final Draft Dog Management Plan for the GGNRA that will decide where you can walk your dog at popular places like Fort Funston, Ocean Beach, and Crissy Field. Sadly, if history is any indication, the plan will likely continue park service attempts to ban dogs – and, therefore, people with dogs – from nearly all of the

80,000-acre

GGNRA.

Congress created the GGNRA in 1972 with a mandate to preserve and expand

recreational open

space. For nearly 40 years, the park service managed the GGNRA for recreational access, including off-leash dog walking on only 1% of the land. People, dogs, plants and wildlife have coexisted peacefully for decades.

Kicking Out People With Dogs

But, in the late 1990s, the park service began a series of moves to restrict dog walking, culminating in a draft dog plan in 2011 that would cut current off-leash access by over 90%, with no real justification for the change.

Despite tens of thousands of public comments that overwhelmingly opposed the plan, the park service released a

second draft in late 2013 with only insignificant, largely cosmetic changes. They still propose to ban dogs entirely from most of Fort Funston and 3/4 of Ocean Beach, remove dogs from all of the trails in the Marin headlands and require leashes at Marin’s dog-friendly Muir Beach. The plan allows no off-leash space in San Mateo County. In essence, people with dogs are facing a ban from 99.9% of the GGNRA.

But it’s not just dogs. The park service also wants to restrict – if not outright ban – bonfires on Ocean Beach. They have set difficult requirements on equestrians in Marin, and hassled boogie boarders on Ocean Beach. All recreation in the GGNRA is at risk.

Changing the Mandate

In January 2015, despite mounting criticism, the park service signed a new GGNRA General Management Plan that declared they would manage nearly all land in this urban recreation area the

same way they manage remote pristine wilderness – by designating nearly all of the GGNRA to be managed for low visitor use and controlled access. Recreation is not even listed as one of the guiding principles in the new general plan.

Most of Fort Funston and 3/4 of Ocean Beach will now be managed like the backcountry of

Yosemite.

With the stroke of a pen, the park service changed the GGNRA’s mandate away from recreation, without Congressional authorization.

Congress Gets Interested

In March, representatives of Save Our Recreation, a coalition of recreational groups to which SFDOG belongs, met with Republican and Democratic Congressional offices on Capitol Hill about the GGNRA. These meetings revealed a nearly universal exasperation with the park service because of its heavy-handed dealings with local communities.

Congresswoman Jackie Speier, who has strongly supported dog walking in the GGNRA, recently called attempts to restrict recreational access in this urban recreation area “un-American.” And in a letter to the park service last month, Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi reiterated the importance of recreation in



the GGNRA, and called on the park service to “consider, consult and incorporate” concerns about the plans.

Both echo the Boards of Supervisors of all three counties with GGNRA land (San Francisco, Marin and San Mateo) who have gone on record opposing the plans.

The GGNRA has a new Superintendent, Christine Lehnertz, who had been the Western Regional Director for the park service. She is the person who delayed signing the new general management plan for nearly nine months, ostensibly to accommodate the concerns about the plan expressed by the public and elected officials. However, when she finally signed it, making it official, there had been no changes made to it.

Congress is now watching the park service closely to see how it implements the general plan and how they include public input on the final dog plan.

The Final Dog Rule

The park service has said they plan to release a Draft Final Rule for a Dog Management Plan in late summer/early fall of this year. They will take public comment on it, and then release a Final Rule in 2016.

Only substantial, sweeping changes to the dog plan from previous drafts will be acceptable to the community, local elected officials, and Congress.

The population of the Bay Area is rapidly increasing and people need places for recreation and to exercise their dogs. We need *more* recreational opportunities not *less*. The park service must start listening and working with its neighbors and stop trying to restrict recreational access in the GGNRA.

If they don't, all bets are off.

SFDOG has asked a high-powered local law firm, to explore our legal options. The dog community now has more support than ever, with local elected officials at all levels – county, state and Congress – demanding more recreational access, including for dog walking.

The National Park Service will celebrate its centennial throughout 2016. It would be a shame if that celebration were marred by protests, bad publicity, and Congressional rebukes because they unilaterally decided to change the GGNRA's mandate and took actions designed to keep people, including people with dogs, out of the GGNRA.



My name is Buddy, and I guess I'm the new one percent when it comes to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

That's right— I can only take my human companion (she answers to "owner") into less than one percent of this urban park.

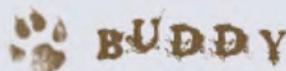
You probably know the facts: humans with dog companions have lower rates of stress, heart disease and depression. When we walk our humans, we help keep them active, engaged and happy.



So why is the Golden Gate National Recreation Area trying to make it even harder for us to help our human companions? Right now they limit us to just one percent of the park, and they are trying to shut us out even more – particularly from places we love in the San Francisco Bay Area like Fort Funston, Muir Beach, Rancho Corral de Tierra and other areas where dogs, humans and other animals are all happily sharing.

Please don't let a few grumpy humans stop us from helping our human companions. Let the GGNRA know—dogs need space to walk their people.

Join us today at www.SaveOurRecreation.com!



“Save Our Recreation” Energizes the Bay Area

Last year, SFDOG joined with others who want to preserve recreation in the GGNRA to form an umbrella group called Save Our Recreation (SOR). Recreational users – bike riders, hikers, surfers, equestrians, and others – have to work together to win our struggle to keep *all* recreation, including dog walking, in the GGNRA.

So far, over 10,000 supporters have signed SOR’s petition urging President Obama and other federal officials to keep the GGNRA open for recreation.

Last December, SOR placed a public service ad that aired on a San Francisco radio station, in which Congresswoman Jackie Speier called on the park service to keep recreation in the GGNRA.

In January, SOR put the “Buddy ad” (see the previous page) on page two of *The Hill*, a must-read publication for Washington, DC insiders, on the first day of Congress to raise awareness among Congressmembers and their staff.

In March, SOR organized a rally

outside of the National Park Service office in San Francisco with a loud and clear message – we must preserve recreation in the GGNRA. San Mateo County Supervisor Adrienne J. Tissier and an aide to SF Supervisor Scott Wiener spoke in support.

Also in March, SOR organized a delegation to meet with members of Congress in Washington, DC who want to help us keep access to the GGNRA. The San Francisco Chronicle ran a front-page article about the trip that highlighted Congresswoman Jackie Speier’s support for SOR’s efforts. Ironically, the article appeared the same day National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis was in the Bay Area drumming up support for the National Park Service’s centennial. Jarvis is the person most responsible for the park service’s plans to nearly eliminate off-leash dog walking in the GGNRA, and we’re sure it wasn’t what he wanted to see when he opened the local paper that morning.

Save Our Recreation continues to grow. If you are a member of a group that recreates in the GGNRA and would like a presentation about the park service’s plans to restrict all recreational uses, send an email to: info@saveourrecreation.com



Learn more about Save Our Recreation and sign the petition at: www.saveourrecreation.com

Be sure to like the Facebook page: www.facebook.com/saveourrecreation

IT’S TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP IN SFDOG

At this critical moment, off-leash recreation is under attack in the GGNRA and city parks. Please renew your membership today so we can continue to advocate, organize, and agitate on behalf of the dog-loving community in San Francisco and the Bay Area.

Additional donations will help support our legal, educational, and networking efforts.

Membership and donations are tax deductible.

Renew online (www.sfdog.org) or fill in this form, and return with your payment (checks made out to SFDOG) to:

SFDOG
P.O. Box 31071
San Francisco, CA 94131

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Dues (\$20/year) Additional Donation \$ _____ TOTAL ENCLOSED: \$ _____

Would you prefer to receive future newsletters by: Mail Email

Which park(s) do you frequent? _____

How many dogs do you have? _____ Does your household have children? _____ Ages? _____

Are you a senior citizen? _____ Who is your SF City Supervisor? _____

SFDOG needs volunteers. Can you help with any of the following areas?

- Membership – help maintain database, identify benefits for members, work on the The Wag newsletter
- Social Media – help create and maintain social media accounts for SFDOG, including our web page
- Activities – help plan events for members, e.g., member meetings, picnics, doggie socials, educational workshops
- Advocacy – write letters, meet with public officials, monitor dog issues in SF, network with other dog groups
- Other _____

San Francisco City Parks Update

Several months ago, the SF Recreation and Park Department (RPD) installed new signs in and around the legal off-leash Dog Play Area (DPA) near the Jerry Garcia Amphitheater in McLaren Park. The signs said dogs had to be on leash at all times in the area around the amphitheater. RPD Park Patrol officers, citing the new signs, began to harass and ticket people walking with dogs in the area. The only problem – the signs were wrong. For decades, the area in and around the amphitheater has been part of a legal off-leash DPA. Signs near the amphitheater stated that dogs were allowed off-leash in the area except when a permitted event was occurring; people were asked to leash dogs only during performances. The new signs that appeared said dogs had to be on-leash at all times near and inside the amphitheater. There had been no public comment on the change in off-leash status, no approval of the change at a Recreation and Park Commission meeting. It is not clear why the signs were suddenly changed or who authorized it, but when McLaren Park users complained to RPD and showed that the area in and around the amphitheater had always been off-leash, RPD finally admitted the new signs were wrong and had them removed.

In addition, other new signs have appeared in McLaren and many other parks that include areas managed by RPD's Natural Areas Program (NAP), a program to replace existing habitat, even healthy trees and plants, with "native" plants that were here over 1,000 years ago. But NAP is still in the middle of an Environmental Impact Review process and its management plan is not yet in effect. The signs should not have been installed before the EIR process was completed, since changes to the NAP management plan may come out of the EIR process. Yet there they are.



NAP is a hugely controversial and unpopular program. Once the EIR is finalized, the NAP management plan will close 15% of the total off-leash acreage in city parks, mostly in McLaren and Bernal Heights Park. This loss of off-leash space could prove disastrous for people with dogs when combined with the loss of nearly all of the off-leash access in the GGNRA, if the National Park Service has its way there. The NAP management plan also will cut down over 15,000 non-native trees and calls for the use of huge amounts of toxic herbicides to keep non-natives from growing back. The idea that native plants are somehow superior to non-natives, the basis of NAP, has been largely discredited in scientific circles. A decade ago, NAP grabbed control of 1/4 of all the city parkland in San Francisco, and they're not willingly giving any of it back.

We will continue to monitor NAP and are working with other park groups to limit NAP's impact on city parks.

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ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

