

Call Washington to Save Off Leash Dog Walking!

The National Park Service promised a full public comment process to decide about off leash dog walking. Nevertheless, the Golden Gate National Recreation Area is now undermining the fairness of that public decision making process by trying to eliminate off leash dog walking before the public comment starts. They say “Washington” is forcing the change.

Although we have a good chance of retaining dog walking access in the long run if given a fair public comment process, there is little chance if we are eliminated before the public hearing begins. That is why we need to act now to make Washington stop the efforts to drive us out.

Please telephone, fax and write letters to the Washington NPS offices, the Department of Interior and to our congressional delegation. The key telephone numbers and addresses are listed on the back, along with a sample letter. More information and other sample letters to download and print are available at www.fortfunstonforum.com.

We have a single simple message to convey:

The GGNRA’s concerted attempt to eliminate off leash dog walking before the public comment period is unfair and undemocratic, and must be stopped now.

The GGNRA conduct truly is an outrage against democratic process -- they are changing the policy and beginning enforcement before rather than after they hold the public input forum they supposedly set up to evaluate whether to make the change. That will make the process a farce. The old pet policy worked fine for 20 years. There is no need to change it abruptly prior to fair, full and careful consideration.

Last November we forced the GGNRA to hold a public hearing before rescinding the off leash policy. Then, at the public hearing in January thousands signed a petition or showed up to stand in the rain waiting for a chance to testify. That people power convinced the Advisory Commission to not rescind the off leash policy. Instead, the Advisory Commission decided to take “no action,” and requested that the GGNRA explore other options and not change the signs or enforcement in the interim.

In response the Park Service set up a public input process called Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPR). That process, supposedly, pursues the recommendations of the Advisory Commission to study the issue to find a way if possible to preserve off leash recreation. Unfortunately, despite announcing support of that public input process, the local GGNRA staff quickly began the new campaign to eliminate us. Now it appears that the GGNRA is moving in for the kill. In the last several weeks, the GGNRA has significantly escalated their efforts to drive the dog walking public out of the parks – putting up new signs forbidding off leash recreation, handing out brochures, and warning that tickets are imminent.

The federal bureaucrats are trying to change the nature of our parks. These dramatic changes in regulation of our beaches and parks are an important public policy decision that will impact our lifestyle and community for decades. However, the GGNRA is trying to sidestep normal public discussion.

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Sample letter:

Re: Golden Gate National Recreation Area – Changed Policy on Off-leash Dog Walking

Years ago, the people of San Francisco agreed to turn over all of our municipal public beaches and beach bluffs to the federal government for management as part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Although the transfer was pursuant to express promises and congressional intent that the traditional uses of the beaches would continue to be allowed, local Park Service employees are now attempting to eliminate all off-leash dog walking. The GGNRA is changing management of the recreation area into management similar to a traditional national park, with the resulting emphasis on wildlife enhancement at the expense of recreation.

Eliminating dog walking is a dramatic change which should not be made without careful consideration and a full and fair public hearing. Fair consideration of whether I may continue to enjoy the sanctuary of freedom to walk my dog on the beach is very important to me.

The GGNRA has had a pet policy for two decades which allows off leash dog walking in some areas. That Pet Policy was approved in 1979 after careful consideration and public hearings, and was based on the conclusion that the general regulation requiring leashing in traditional national parks does not really apply in the unique circumstances of the GGNRA. Now, the GGNRA wants to change its policy, and states that the general leash law regulation now should apply to every inch of this recreation area as well.

Although the GGNRA agreed to a public input process to determine what to do, it nevertheless is unilaterally reversing the longstanding policy before the public input process begins. That is unfair and undemocratic. What good is a public input process if the federal government is so determined to make the change that it abruptly reverses its longstanding policy prior to the public comment period? Please be fair – do not change the off leash policy before the public comment is considered.