

Save Our Recreation and local dog groups bark for joy as Park Service announces decision to end efforts to restrict access for people with dogs in GGNRA

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SAN FRANCISCO – Save Our Recreation and local dog groups celebrated today's National Park Service announcement that it has permanently ended a planning and rulemaking process intended to restrict where you can walk with a dog in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA).

“This is a huge victory for the people of the Bay Area,” said Save Our Recreation's Andrea Buffa. “For years we've been telling the Park Service that dog walking is an important form of recreation for us – it's part of our way of life. Now, finally, they were forced to listen.”

The NPS announcement followed a ten-month review of the dog rule planning and rulemaking process that was initiated as a result of a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit filed by Save Our Recreation, SFDOG, Marin County DOG and Coastside DOG of San Mateo County. Chris Carr, a partner at Baker Botts' office in San Francisco, who has led the litigation, said: “This is a vindication of the power of the public's right to know what its government is doing. The GGNRA is certainly a national treasure, and so is FOIA.”

Emails released as a result of the lawsuit revealed that GGNRA employees, including two Superintendents and the GGNRA FOIA Officer, used private emails to collude with interest groups opposed to dog walking to generate public support for the GGNRA's proposed dog plan. The emails also revealed intentional destruction of documents involved in the rulemaking process, the purposeful omission of scientific data, and extreme bias on the part of the Park Service against people with dogs and against dog walking as a recreational activity.

“We always knew the process was rigged against us,” said Sally Stephens, from the San Francisco Dog Owners Group. “The emails we uncovered because of the FOIA lawsuit proved we were right. And now the Park Service has acknowledged that the documents were damning enough that they couldn't move forward with the dog rule.”

“Thanks to Congresswoman Jackie Speier and new leadership at the Park Service, we are now seeing accountability and transparency that was sorely lacking under the previous NPS Director Jon Jarvis,” Stephens added.

The Park Service announcement states that the GGNRA will manage dog walking according to the 1979 Pet Policy, that allowed dog walking on 1% of GGNRA land, including Fort Funston, Ocean Beach, Crissy Field, Baker Beach, Lands End, Muir Beach, Rodeo Beach, and various trails in the Marin Headlands, among other places.

One remaining question is what happens to dog walking on GGNRA land in San Mateo County, which was not part of the GGNRA in 1979 and therefore is not included in the 1979 Pet Policy.

“People have walked their dogs on the lands in San Mateo that became part of the GGNRA for decades,” Buffa adds. “We call on the Park Service to create a new regulation that will allow for on- and off-leash dog walking at sites in San Mateo County where people have traditionally walked with their dogs.”

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