

ASSEMBLY WATER, PARKS, & WILDLIFE
AND ACCOUNTABILITY & ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW COMMITTEES
JARAD HUFFMAN & ROGER DICKINSON, CHAIRS
NOVEMBER 1, 2011 STATE CAPITOL ROOM 437 9:00 AM
JOINT OVERSIGHT HEARING: IMPACTS & STATUS OF STATE PARK CLOSURES

Agreement Challenges-Proposals

BENICIA STATE PARKS ASSOCIATION BENICIA, CA. P.O. BOX 404 BENICIA, CA. 94510
CAROL BERMAN, BENICIA STATE PARKS, PRESIDENT

TESTIMONY NOTES

Introduction

Benicia, is a town of 30,000 named after General Mariano Vallejo's wife, Dona Benicia Working withIn a system that has failed, the non-profit 501 (c) 3 Benicia State Parks Association, (BSPA) is striving in an unprecedented State Parks closure situation to prevent complete the closure of the only two State Parks in Solano County; the Benicia Capitol State Historic Park and the Benicia State Recreation Area. Our historic park is on First Street, in the middle of our downtown. First Street is Main St. USA. The 1853 Benicia Capitol is the only pre-Sacramento Capitol building in the state still standing. The building was initially restored and dedicated in 1958 with a large contribution of local community funds and support. The Fischer-Hanlon house is the only building in the State parks system that exhibits the life of 19th century upper middle class families. Our residents "own" these parks in a moral and community sense, if not in the legal sense of ownership.

Deed to 1968 Fischer-Hanlon House Tail

Letters from: S.F. Bay Trail and Bay Area Ridge

In 1968, under William Penn Mott, Jr. two Joseph Fischer descendents dedicated the home to the State of California, "to be held in trust on behalf of the people of California...forever". The current BSPA head docent even recalls meeting one of the sisters years after the dedication. In Benicia, we live our history. The Benicia Recreation Area has a critical 2.2 mile segment of both the Bay Area Ridge Trail and the S.F. Bay Trail. The condition of an ABAG grant is that the trails will be maintained by the State of California until the year 2032. An Important Bird Area designated by the California Audubon, the 720 acre Southampton Bay Wetland Natural Preserve lines the Carquinez Strait and access cannot be denied to these waters due to the use of Federal funds in the recreation area. The Botanic Garden, one of the 13 valuable native plant collections in the State has had \$100,000 in grants/donations and \$350,000 in volunteer hours given. Benicians are a "can do" sort of folk.

Participants

Along with the City of Benicia, a community grassroots Stakeholders Committee and the State, BSPA has been striving to meet the challenges of our park closures. The BSPA Volunteer program is strong and growing. Local citizen have already raised \$7,000 without even doing a major community fund raising outreach. We are informed by the state that the current closures days are due to park staff shortages. There are reduced operations now to two days at the historic site and five days of vehicle traffic in the recreation area. I might add this is during a current terrific Salmon run on the strait during which park pass sales have been shown to increase. The fisher people are not happy.

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The City of Benicia and the BSPA are working together with the State on an Agreement that contains three proposals. Two proposals from the city cover the grounds and bathrooms at both parks. The third proposal is for BSPA to operate and do the general upkeep of the interiors of the Capitol and the house. The BSPA, volunteers and docents are to operate interpretive tours for the public. 80% of the artifacts in the house are original to the family and it is the reverse in the Capitol. This is where the real problems are. There is a void of information and direction coming from the State Department of Parks and Recreation. There are no parameters, or models of operation to follow once the state vacates these two parks. In years past, there was a Standard Agreement between the Association and the State. It dealt with a State Department that was omni-present, functioning and supervisory. In the past few years, there has been a lack of training by the state to care for the artifacts. This lack of attention by the state is also the issue in deferred Maintenance, This isn't even an approachable area in any of the three proposals. The deferred maintenance in the two parks runs into the millions of dollars. At present there is a leak in the Capitol roof and the ancient Wisteria has been waiting a number of years for a pergola support.

Conclusion

Well, these are all unintended consequences of a sad situation. The obstacles appear to be trying to understand the State's expectations for the continued operations of the two parks. The volunteer/docent issue for the BSPA has had no offered solutions nor has the issue even been addressed by the state.

The Capitol windows have been measured for plywood, the estimates for historic garden restoration after abandonment have been done. Warehouse space is ready for artifact storage. But, what about now? What about negotiating with the concerned parties? Where is the open discussion for protecting our park treasures? There is need for open disclosure from the state, calm minds, open hearts and reasonable agreements and resolutions between the concerned parties. The BSPA and the Citizens of Benicia treasure their local State Parks just as the State Department of Parks and Recreation does. Let's hope for more dialogue between the concerned entities.

Contact: Carol Berman Benicia State Parks Association P.O. Box 404 Benicia, CA. 94510

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PROTECT BENICIA STATE PARKS WHAT WILL BE LOST

THE BENICIA CAPITOL STATE HISTORIC PARK

Resources at Risk

Benicia Capitol Historic Park has been a State Park since 1958 and along with the Benicia State Recreation Area comprise the only two State Parks in Solano County. It is the only pre-Sacramento Capitol building still standing. The building and the interior has been restored to exhibit a legislative session as it might have occurred when it was the California State Capitol from February 1853 to February 1854.

The Fischer-Hanlon House is the only building in the state of California parks system that exhibits the life of the 19th century upper middle class family. The house was donated to the state of California in 1969. He house is fully furnished with original artifacts the span over a century of family use.

Public Access That Will Be Lost

The general public will no longer have access to these two historic museum quality buildings or Carriage House that is on site. The use of the public bathrooms on the site would also be restricted. The third and fourth grade California elementary school trips will no longer be possible. Curriculum based on California history and architecture will suffer.

Community Contributions That Will Be Lost

Volunteers and docents provide tours of the two historic buildings. Volunteer gardeners assist in maintaining the Capitol grounds and the historic Fischer-Hanlon House garden.

Local Business Impacts

The Capitol and the Fischer-Hanlon house are centrally located in the commercial downtown district of central Benicia. The Capitol building is the historic emblem in every promotional tourism campaign done for the City of Benicia and used in much of the Solano County advertising. State park visitors overwhelmingly also spend money at the downtown shops, restaurants and other historic museums that are only steps away from the Historic State Park.

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BENICIA STATE RECREATION AREA

Resources at Risk

The Benicia State Recreation Area has been a State Park since 1967 and is the only other State Park in Solano County besides the Benicia Capitol State Historic Park. Over 2.2 miles of a critical segment of both the Bay Area Ridge Trail and the San Francisco Bay Trail are at risk. Both of these trails have seen significantly increased usage following the building of the Benicia/Martinez bridge link. The Forrest Deaner Native Plant Botanic Garden is a 3.5 acre volunteer collaborative effort with the California Native Plant Society. It displays water wise plants for use in Solano County. The Southampton Bay Wetland Natural Preserve encompasses over 720 acres and is designated as an Important Bird Area, (IBA) by the California Audubon.

Public Access That Will Be Lost

Benicia, Glen Cove/Vallejo and other Bay Area residents walk, run, hike, bike and fish in the park. Trail users follow the two well documented and published bay trails maps. There are eight camp sites and four large picnic areas overlooking the Carquinez Strait. The use of the public bathrooms on site would also be restricted.

Community Contributions That Will Be Lost

The Botanic Garden has received over \$100,000 in grants and donations. Over \$350,000 worth of volunteer hours has been contributed since groundbreaking in 2003. The garden is listed as one of the thirteen most valuable plant collections in California.

Local Business Impacts

The City of Benicia tourism efforts highlight the bike, hiking and walking trails as well as the access to the Carquinez Strait for people to fish. A disconnecting of the State Park segment from the system could have an adverse effect on tourism.