

GGNRA Recreational Users Coalition

P.O. Box 471238

San Francisco, CA 94147-1238

August 20, 2008

Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
235 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-0508

Dear Madam Speaker,

We, the undersigned, are writing to express our deep concern and opposition to section 2 of HR 6305 as introduced by you, Speaker Pelosi, on June 19, 2008 (see Attachment 1). As currently written, section 2 would change the name of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) to the Golden Gate National Parks and would not protect long-standing urban recreational uses of the area for current or future generations. Because of the strength and breadth of the opposition to the proposed name change, we have established the GGNRA Recreational Users Coalition, which is comprised of the groups identified below.

While on the surface this "name change" may appear innocuous or simply a *technical correction* as we have been told by your staff, we are nonetheless very concerned about this proposed name re-designation of the GGNRA. Your staff has assured us that this name change will not affect the management of the GGNRA and that "all park units are managed in the same manner, whether they are designated as a national park or a national recreation area." But this explanation ignores the fact that the GGNRA is one of our "nation's greatest natural treasures" that provides not only a majestic natural setting but it also provides many opportunities for people to recreate in an urban environment on a daily basis as recognized in the original enabling legislation.

The original intent of establishing the GGNRA as documented in the 1972 Enabling Legislation (PL92-589) and bill report (see Attachment 2), was to "capitalize on the availability of this important, unequaled treasure in the San Francisco region by establishing a new national urban recreation area which will concentrate on serving the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the metropolitan region. As an urban area, it must relate to the desires and interests of the people, but it must at the same time, be managed in manner that will protect it for future generations".

Re-designating the name of the GGNRA to the Golden Gate National Parks would not change the image of it as one of the "nation's greatest natural treasures". If the GGNRA were to become re-designated as a National Park, the fiscal advantages appear to be limited. According to National Park Service estimates, this new Park would receive a

15% increase in its annual budget. Currently, the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy (a cooperating non-profit association for the GGNRA that works closely with GGNRA's administrators on the development, implementation and operation of the projects it funds) has been extremely successful in their fundraising efforts, fundraising close to \$60 million in the past five years to support natural resource management and capital improvement projects in the GGNRA. According to the Parks Conservancy website, they had approximately 20,000 volunteers in 2007 who worked at various program locations in the GGNRA. Given these numbers, there does not appear to be a lack of donations or volunteers to support the on-going Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy programs in the GGNRA.

We are concerned that if this legislation passes as it is written today, the intent, purpose and uses of the GGNRA, as an urban recreation area, will be eliminated for present and future generations. There is ample room to satisfy people's recreational needs as well as protecting natural resources throughout the GGNRA. None of these interests are mutually exclusive as people can enjoy nature and recreate simultaneously in the GGNRA. Traditional recreation uses in the GGNRA, include but are not limited to, running, walking, kite flying, birding, picnicking, bicycling, off leash dog walking, horseback riding, hiking, hang gliding, surfing, kayaking, outrigger canoeing, windsurfing, kite boarding, and similar water sports. People connect to this recreation area everyday.

There appears to be a growing trend amongst some of the conservation community in our area, who have misinterpreted the balance intended by the enabling act to protect both natural resources and urban recreation toward managing the area for resource protection over other uses, which was not originally intended. As Amy Meyer, Co-chair for A People For a Golden National Recreation Area, explains in her book, **New Guardians For the Golden Gate, 2006**, on Page 2, *"Because "recreation area" implies less protection than "national park", the Park Service unofficially began to use a new name for the GGNRA in 2000. Muir Woods National Monument and Fort Point National Historic Site were included within the GGNRA's boundary in 1972; together, all three entities are now usually called the Golden Gate National Parks. Someday an act of Congress will cause the name "Golden Gate National Recreation Area" to disappear."*

Testimony on the bill from current and former National Park Service officials underscores their view that the name change would affect management. A coalition of retirees of the National Park Service (who constitute about 660 former employees, primarily senior level officials), wrote a letter to the House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands, adamantly opposing this name change (see Attachment 3). Additionally, NPS' testimony at the July 16th hearing stated the GGNRA is appropriately named as a recreation area (see Attachment 4). The testimony noted the name change to a national park could limit urban recreation uses, compared to the current designation, due to the precedent that would be set for other national parks. Also, we have spoken to many local GGNRA staff off line about this proposed "name change" and we have not found one who supports this re-designation.

Some other justifications for this name change that have been conveyed publicly include that it would increase the “*stature*” of the GGNRA and give it a “*boost*” for marketing purposes. We question these justifications when clearly the GGNRA does not even meet the NPS’ definition of a National Park (see Attachment 5). And it is also our understanding that there is a movement to create a “Wilderness Corridor” from Pt Reyes to San Mateo, which would include these GGNRA lands. We think that this idea of a Wilderness Corridor is inappropriate, as the lands within the GGNRA have been clearly promulgated for urban recreation use and clearly, this is not a wilderness area.

While it is unclear to us why you want this name change, it is clear to us that we do not support and adamantly oppose section 2 of HR 6305 as proposed.

Our concern is magnified based upon the response that some user groups have received to suggested language changes that would make it clear for generations to come that the original recreation and open spaces purposed would be preserved. The failure to include express language protecting the original purpose of the GGNRA together with the National Park Service testimony that such a name change would impact recreational and open space uses compel our conclusion that the name change should not be changed.

If Amy Meyer is correct, as she reports in her book, that there has been a quiet program in the GGNRA to treat the GGNRA as a national park since 2000 with a goal, as she predicts, that one day Congress will do away with the word recreation to provide more protection, then that issue must be addressed in the public openly and fully rather than as a proposed technical amendment that some apparently intend will have far reaching implications for recreational and open space uses.

As such, we request that HR 6305 be put on hold until the next Congressional Session begins in January 2009, and that the Speaker’s office hold local hearings in the affected counties (Marin, San Francisco and San Mateo) for the public to address their legitimate concerns in the interim.

We appreciate how responsive your staff has been to us about this issue and we hope to hear back from you soon.

GGNRA Recreational Users Coalition

San Francisco Boardsailers
Peter Thorner

Marin Watch
Jane Woodman

Marin Horse Council
Sandy Greenblatt

Surfrider Foundation-Marine Chapter
Scott Tye

Cal Dog
Gary Fergus

Coastside Horse Council-San Mateo
Larry DeYoung

Bay and Coast Kayak Club
Pat Shea

Crissy Field Dog Group
Martha Walters

Marin Green Dog Alliance
Sonja Hanson

Attachments

1. HR 6305-introduced by Speaker Pelosi on June 19, 2008
2. GGNRA Enabling Legislation (PL92-589) bill report
3. NPS' Retirees Coalition written testimony, July 15, 2008
4. NPS' written testimony for the House Committee on Natural Resources, July 15, 2008, U.S. House of Representatives
5. NPS' Definition of a National Park and a National Recreation Area

Ccs: Senator Diane Feinstein D-CA
Senator Barbara Boxer D-CA
Rep. Lynn Woolsey D-Marin
Rep. Jackie Speier D-San Mateo
Richard Kempthorne, Secretary of the Interior
Mary Bomar, National Park Service Director
Jon Jarvis, NPS Western Regional Director
Brian O'Neill, Superintendent, GGNRA
Mayor Gavin Newsom, City of San Francisco
Supervisor Michela Alioto, San Francisco
Supervisor Carmen Chu, San Francisco
Supervisor Charles McGlashan, Marin
Supervisor Steve Kinsey, Marin
Supervisor Mark Church, San Mateo
Supervisor Rich Gordon, San Mateo