



County of San Mateo

Inter-Departmental Correspondence

Department: PARKS

File #: 23-628

Board Meeting Date: 7/25/2023

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors
From: Nicholas J. Calderon, Parks Director
Subject: Off-Leash Dog Recreation at Quarry County Park

RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt a resolution authorizing the San Mateo County Parks Department to apply for all permits necessary, including a Coastal Development Permit, to make off-leash dog recreation a permissible use at Quarry County Park.

BACKGROUND:

At the October 23, 2018 Board of Supervisors meeting, the Board directed the Parks Department ("Department") to prepare a recommendation for an off-leash dog recreation pilot program. To assist in this process, the Department created the San Mateo County Parks Dog Work Group ("Work Group"), which was comprised of two Parks Commissioners, three park rangers, members of the Midcoast Community Council and Pescadero Municipal Advisory Council, and representatives from the dog owner, conservationist, equestrian, and mountain bike communities. After the Work Group held monthly public meetings for one year and received extensive public feedback, the Department developed a recommendation for an off-leash dog recreation pilot program at Quarry County Park and Pillar Point Bluff.

At the November 9, 2021 meeting of the Board of Supervisors, the Board certified the off-leash dog recreation pilot program's Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration ("IS/MND") and authorized the Department to commence the recommended pilot program (pending a Coastal Development Permit). Because the County's Ordinance Code prohibited off-leash dog recreation in County parks, on November 16, 2021, the Board amended Section 3.68.180 of the Ordinance Code to authorize off-leash dog recreation on County park trails that were designated by the Department as appropriate for such use. The amended ordinance also established specific requirements that governed the new use.

At its April 5, 2022 meeting, the Board issued a Coastal Development Permit for the pilot program at Quarry County Park. It was determined that due to sensitive natural resources present, Pillar Point Bluff would be removed from consideration for the pilot program and continue to support on-leash dog recreation only.

DISCUSSION:

The off-leash dog recreation pilot program commenced at Quarry County Park in April of 2022. For the 10-months preceding the pilot program, monitoring occurred to establish baseline conditions for dog recreation at the park. The Department then conducted a 12-month monitoring program to observe compliance with pilot program requirements as well as to identify any adverse impacts that may occur as a result of the new use. Monitoring observations were based on the eight indicators established by the pilot program's Adaptive Management Plan ("AMP"). These indicators included: (1) presence of dog waste, (2) fecal coliform levels, (3) harassment of wildlife, (4) dog entry into sensitive areas, (5) dogs traveling off trail, (6) leash compliance for on-leash trails, (7) interactions between other visitors and dogs, and (8) changes in park visitation in response to visitors with off-leash dogs.

The Department's Natural Resource Management division conducted routine monitoring at Quarry County Park twice a week for the duration of the pilot program to measure these indicators and to document any impacts that may have occurred. Findings were documented and reported to the public in two-month intervals via the Department's website.

Findings

The AMP set responsible compliance thresholds for each of the eight indicators. Each indicator and its corresponding threshold is detailed in Exhibit A attached. Throughout the 12-month monitoring period, there were only two (of six) monitoring periods where dog waste observed exceeded the compliance threshold of 20 pieces per month and one monitoring period where leash compliance was not met. Additionally, the fecal coliform water quality sampling was inconclusive due to poor water flow as a result of historic drought conditions.

For the remaining indicators, observed compliance was well below the set thresholds. Specifically, there were no observations of dogs harassing wildlife, no observations of dogs entering sensitive habitat areas, nine total instances where dogs were observed travelling more than ten feet off trail, two total instances where an unwelcomed interaction between a dog and visitors occurred, and overall leash compliance for the trails designated for on-leash recreation was greater than 80% (threshold was 70%). No known or reported dog-related injuries occurred during the pilot program.

Park visitation demographics were also monitored throughout the 12-month pilot program, and 34% of park visitors observed were visiting with their dog(s), compared to 66% without dogs. Of the visitors with dogs, 65% preferred to have their dogs off leash. These observations are consistent with the baseline visitation observations prior to the start of the pilot program.

Next Steps

As a result of the findings made at the conclusion of the pilot program, the Department recommends that off-leash dog recreation be a permissible use at Quarry County Park. In accordance with the County's Local Coastal Program, this change in use requires a Coastal Development Permit. Should the Board approve of the recommendation, the Department will apply for a Coastal Development Permit and seek any other permits necessary to formalize off-leash dog recreation at Quarry County Park.

Should the Department observe non-compliance with Section 3.68.180 of the County Ordinance Code, or should environmental degradation occur due to off-leash dog recreation, the Department reserves the ability to restrict or prohibit off-leash dog recreation at Quarry County Park in the future.

County Attorney's Office has reviewed and approved the resolution as to form.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no Net County Cost associated with the adoption of the recommendation.