

August 2, 2014

Dear Director Linda Mangat,

We are writing as concerned citizens, volunteers and park users regarding a situation in Cuyamaca Rancho State Park.

There has been a recent change in the administration of the horse camps in Cuyamaca Rancho State Park that we feel is unsafe, placing both the public and state at risk. It has come to our attention that the park has opened the horse campgrounds to non-equestrian campers.

We have been involved with Cuyamaca Rancho State Park for a range of 44-65 years, both as park users enjoying the beauty of the park and as volunteers in the park. We are educated in and support park policies and understand how difficult managing public lands can be with so many different types of recreation and the need to generate revenue. But, in this area, we respectfully disagree with the current park management. Historically, there has not been the mixing of equestrian and non-equestrian campers within campgrounds for a number of reasons. Horses attract flies, the odor of manure, etc. that some campers may find offensive. In the interface between equestrians and non-equestrians there are a number of safety factors in camping with others that may not know and understand equine behavior. For example, children raised around horses are educated not to go into corrals, feed horses by hand, or pet them without permission and/or supervision. People not familiar with equine behavior may think it is alright to feed horses carrots, pet them and in some cases go into corrals, or run up to or ride bicycles or tricycles up to or close to mounted horses. They may get stepped on, bit or even kicked if they decide to approach the horse without the permission and/or under the guidance of the horse owner, or spook the horse, thereby potentially injuring the rider. Dogs unaccustomed to horses create another safety issue. Putting non horse people in a horse camp creates a dangerous condition thereby placing both the horse owner and the state at risk for a law suit.

When we met recently with District Superintendent Dan Falat and Park Superintendent Kevin Best to discuss the situation, we were told that there was no policy to prevent non-equestrians from camping in the campground, despite ReserveAmerica's instructions from State Parks that horse campers must have horses with them. While Park management decided to open the spaces after 5:00 p.m. to non-equestrians as is done for ADA campsites, they will not direct people to open campsites in the non-equestrian campground first. If this is true then the same should hold for the equestrian camper who now may not have a place to camp and may need to go the traditional campground, or may simply wish to camp wherever they like, as seems is the case when non horse campers have recently booked a site in the Green Valley Horse Camp. Due to these concerns the horse camp volunteer host may not stay.

Park administration is also allowing any group to compete with horse groups to reserve Los Vaqueros Group Horse Camp which is only open seasonally 14 weeks a year. Additional revenue would be possible if the costs to reserve Los Vaqueros were lowered for midweek reservations as is established in other State Park campgrounds elsewhere in California.

We respectfully request a review of the Department's Campground policy as it pertains to equestrian vs. traditional camping, and we strongly urge that horse camps be restricted to campers accompanied by horses. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Peggy and Bernie Martin
representing a passionate group of equestrian park users (see attached)
peggy150@gmail.com 619-818-9686 11190 Hwy 79, Descanso, CA 91916

Each of the folks listed here are members of various horse groups, including Cuyamaca Equestrian Association, Backcountry Horsemen of California, Saddle SoreOrity, Ramona Trails Association, Pine Valley Mountain Riders, Los Senderos de San Diego, Lakeside Frontier Riders, Bonita Valley Horsemen and Tijuana River Valley Equestrian Association.

Several are also active volunteers in the Mounted Assistance Unit and Trails Maintenance Unit in Cuyamaca. Others have been representatives appointed to the Equestrian Stakeholders following the Cedar Fire and more recently during the General Plan Update.

We join with Peggy and Bernie Martin and support the letter above:

Ernie Smith
Terry and Marty Jorgensen
Patty Heyden
Bill Butters
Mark Kukuchek
Julie Murphy
Kandhy Franklin