

September 23, 2014

Brian Ketterer, Acting Chief
Southern Division
California Dept. of Parks and Recreation

Chief Ketterer:

We are the members of the Cuyamaca Equestrian Stakeholders Committee, which was originally formed to work with Bob Patterson of State Parks during the ongoing General Plan process for Cuyamaca Rancho State Park. When local equestrians recently learned of a change in the use of the horse camps they began to question the management of Green Valley Equestrian Campground and Los Vaqueros Equestrian Group Camp by State Parks staff and a member of our committee, Peggy Martin, set up a meeting with Colorado Desert District Superintendent Dan Falat and Montane Superintendent Kevin Best and asked the rest of us to attend. After meeting with Mr. Falat and Mr. Best it was decided by our committee to send a letter expressing our concerns to Acting Director Mangat.

On September 2nd we received your reply. Since then Peggy Martin has remained as a consultant but requested the committee respond to your letter.

Your letter states that California State Parks has not changed any policies or practices concerning use of the Horse Camps in Cuyamaca. Mr. Falat made that clear to us in our meeting with him- it wasn't a change of State Parks policy, it was that there was no prior policy to begin with- it had never been needed and had never been a problem in the past. The loss of camping sites in Cuyamaca after the 2003 Cedar Fire (especially group sites) and the need for the state to generate revenue has created a situation where obviously State Parks feels that camping sites need to be filled whenever possible, even if that means placing non-equestrians in sites previously held for equestrian campers. This has not been the practice in this area in the past- we have been told this many, many times by both equestrian and non-equestrian campers, and current park staff, as recently as this last week. The members of this committee have been intimately involved with Cuyamaca State Park negotiating equestrian issues for over twenty years. Several of us have even worked for the park at one time or another, either as paid staff or volunteers. When Cuyamaca State Park made the choice to place non-equestrian campers in Green Valley Horse Camp the local equestrian community raised the alarm immediately- that very first weekend- and upon questioning park staff we were told that they had just been instructed to initiate the change. Committee members were camped at Green Valley that first weekend and witnessed first hand the unsafe conditions that resulted from the unplanned mixing of equestrian and non-equestrian campers and the delayed emergency response and lack of enforcement that exacerbated the dangerous situation. Therefore, while there has not been a written change in State Parks policy there definitely has been a significant unannounced change in implementation of local park policies that has had a significant and detrimental effect on the ability of equestrians to use and enjoy Cuyamaca Rancho State Park.

You state in your September 2nd letter to Peggy and Bernie Martin that State Parks provides "preferred" access to equestrian amenities by requiring persons who make a reservation that they will be traveling with a horse. (This really should be corrected to "stock"- some people bring mules or donkeys.) And the ReserveAmerica reservation site reflects this in the written site text that stock are required to reserve sites and, if you speak to a customer service representative they are required to ask you how many stock you are bringing and, if you say "none", they are directed to deny the reservation. When Superintendent Falat declared in our meeting that he had no ability to enforce "exclusivity" at Green

Valley and Los Vaqueros when it was pointed out to him that ReserveAmerica required campers to have horses in order to reserve a site there. His response was that it was a ReserveAmerica policy, not a State Parks one. When it was pointed out that ReserveAmerica was operating under direction of State Parks and using protocols set by the same, he reiterated that it was ReserveAmerica policy, not State Parks. Yet supposedly they work for you and are your representative to the public.

Despite the assurance in your letter that State Parks provides “preferred” access to Green Valley Equestrian Campground and Los Vaqueros Group Horse Camp for equestrians (and the ReserveAmerica site supports this), Non-equestrian groups continue to reserve Los Vaqueros and sites in Green Valley Equestrian Campground. Superintendent Falat stated in our August 23rd 2014 meeting that park staff had no way to confirm whether campers who made reservations truly had stock with them or not. It seems fairly simple to us. If the site is reserved, are there horses or other stock in the corrals? If there are no horses or stock or people present, is there perhaps fresh manure in the corrals. Non-equestrian campers, either through word of mouth or social media, have learned they can reserve online individual sites at Green Valley or the group camp at Los Vaqueros without having stock and are taking advantage of the situation. Rancho Cuyamaca State Parks rangers and staff, by their own admission, are either incapable of or unwilling to prevent it.

In the meeting with Superintendent Falat and Kevin Best Mr. Falat stated that sites in Green Equestrian Campground would be treated in the same way as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) sites were treated- if after 1700 hrs. the site was not reserved and empty a non-equestrian camper could be placed in it on a day-to-day basis- they could not reserve the site and they would have to leave the next day by the normal checkout time. Members of the committee have repeatedly been told by equestrians and park staff that this is not being done- that non-equestrian campers are being directed to Green Valley Horse Camp sites at any time, even before 1700 hours. The most recent incident was September 15th when a park employee informed Peggy Martin that she had been instructed to send non-equestrian campers to Green Valley Equestrian Camp “any time of day” and with the “new administration” it was “no longer a horse camp”. This staff member was one of several others who have stated this fact.

We understand that part of the problem is that Green Valley and Los Vaqueros are being underutilized by the equestrian community, sometimes leaving sites empty. We are doing everything we can to help resolve this by making the equestrian community aware of this, the part it plays in this problem, and trying to promote more use of both of the camps. However, part of the problem is price- renting Los Vaqueros Group Camp is twice the cost of renting an equivalent Federal horse camp in the area. And part of the problem with Green Valley Equestrian Camp is that it was never designed as an equestrian camp- it was converted from a non-equestrian camp as a short-term fix until a new equestrian camp was built in the north end of the park to replace Los Caballos Horse Camp- and many of the sites there have access issues for the larger trailers with living quarters that many equestrians use today.

The members of this committee were chose because of their extensive experience developing positive, long-term relationships with local, state and federal public land managers in our area. We represent the equestrian community accurately and although we do not hesitate to stand up for what we believe in or what we feel is right for our community, we do it in a way that we feel is respectful and considerate of the land managers and other user groups and stakeholders. We understand the difficulty of appeasing everyone and we embrace the concept of compromise whenever possible. But what is happening in Cuyamaca is extremely unsettling to the equestrian community (both local and statewide) and has created a firestorm of discontent and frustration. We as a committee are doing our best to disseminate

accurate and timely information to the equestrian community, but rumors and misinformation are rampant and the wounds created by our loss of Los Caballos Horse Camp have not yet fully healed. Many equestrians are writing their legislators, gathering petitions, and talking to the media about how they feel that, once again, Cuyamaca is discriminating against equestrians. We in this committee do not believe that is State Park's intent, but more radical members of our community are presenting a good case and people are listening. There are those who are going as far as to say that the resolution (or lack of) these equestrian issues in Cuyamaca will have statewide or even national implications- perhaps so, but this committee isn't concerned about that at this time.

Our goal from the beginning has been to address this problem at the local level if at all possible, but after the initial meeting with Mr. Falat and Mr. Best the committee felt that contacting your office to confirm that what was happening locally was supported by your department was appropriate. Our committee feels that actions that have been taken (and are currently being taken) by Rancho Cuyamaca State Parks staff are outside the guidelines set by your letter dated September 2nd 2014 and outside the operating procedures that Mr. Falat stated his staff would follow in our August meeting. We are asking for California State Parks staff to follow the procedures and guidelines for Green Valley Equestrian Camp and Los Vaqueros Equestrian Group Camp that you elaborated to us in your letter and for Cuyamaca Rancho State Park rangers and staff to enforce the camping criteria set forth on the ReserveAmerica website that requires campers to have stock with them.

Our committee currently has a meeting scheduled with Colorado Desert District Superintendent Dan Falat, San Diego County Supervisor Dianne Jacob, and other state legislators at Supervisor Jacob's office on October 1st 2014 to address these issues. Our goal is to hopefully come to some kind of resolution that will prove beneficial to all and for equestrians to continue to have a positive working relationship with California State Parks locally and statewide.

Please forward your response to all of the committee members below by email. Thank you for your time.

The Cuyamaca Equestrian Stakeholders Committee

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