

Kern County Parks and Recreation Commission

**Public Services Building
2700 M Street
Bakersfield, CA 93301**

**March 25, 2015
6:30 P.M.**

MINUTES

A meeting of the Kern County Parks and Recreation Commission was held on Wednesday, March 25, 2015. Chairman Jamison presided.

Present: Bob Jamison, District I; Mark Faull, District II; Carl Park, District III; Gregory McGiffney, District IV; Vacant, District V.

Staff: Bob Lerude, Director, Kern County Parks and Recreation Department; Kari Dries, Kern County Parks and Recreation Department; and Michele Timmerman, Kern County Aging and Adult Services Department.

Others: There were 8 others present.

NOTE: Ja, Fa, Pa and Mc are abbreviations for Commissioners Jamison, Faull, Park and McGiffney. As an example, Ja-Fa denotes Commissioner Jamison made a motion and Commissioner Faull seconded the motion.

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m. Chairman Jamison led the flag salute.

1. Approval of the Minutes of February 25, 2015

Fa-Pa to approve the Minutes of February 25, 2015. All ayes, motion carried.

2. Discuss Disabled Veterans/POW Discounted Rate and Corresponding Setting Aside of Campsites at BVARA

Chairman Jamison asked if Mr. Lerude had any information to share on this item. Mr. Lerude said that this issue has been before the Commission a couple of times. Information is included in the memo he provided, and Mr. Cox is also in the audience, who may want to comment.

Mr. Lerude said that the basic idea is that although there is currently a lifetime camping pass available to disabled veterans that once purchased for \$10, camping thereafter is free, there is no opportunity for reservation of campsites. Mr. Cox is proposing that there be the opportunity for reservation, and that five

(5) waterfront campsites with full hook-ups and five (5) non-waterfront campsites with full hook-ups, with stays up to ten (10) days from Labor Day to the day prior to Memorial Day, and five (5) days from Memorial Day to the day before Labor Day be held available for Disabled Veterans/POW at \$15 per day.

Mr. Lerude said that peak season actually runs from March 15th through October 15th and non-peak season runs from October 16th through March 14th. The regular pricing per campsite is \$40 during peak season and \$36 during non-peak season. The annual revenue for camping is \$475-\$500 thousand dollars; however there is no breakdown available as to waterfront/non-waterfront, peak season/non-peak season revenues.

Mr. Lerude said that his memo asks the question as to how the \$15 Disabled Veterans/POW rate would be used. For example, if a Veteran purchases a lifetime pass which does not require a fee for a campsite would they now purchase the \$15 per day campsite? Mr. Lerude said there is not a specific way to look at this because there may be folks who will now always make a reservation and pay the \$15, and there may be some that stay with the lifetime camping pass and take their chances with first come first served.

What it comes down to is either a \$10 lifetime camping pass where nothing is paid for a campsite from that point forward; versus paying \$15 for a campsite resulting in some revenue for the campsite. It is unknown whether that revenue would offset the potential \$36-\$40 in revenue that may be received on a campsite otherwise. There is of course the possibility the site may not have been reserved otherwise, so \$15 in revenue may be realized.

Mr. Lerude said that his memo differs from Mr. Cox's proposal in that he has suggested the setting aside of three (3) waterfront campsites with full hook-ups and three (3) non-waterfront campsites with full hook-ups, versus five (5).

Commissioner McGiffney asked how many campsites are currently utilized under the \$10 lifetime camping pass. Mr. Lerude said the Department does not have those numbers. Commissioner Faull asked if staff was able to come up with a best guess. Mr. Lerude said that although the peak season starts in March and runs through October, in reality March until Memorial Day and after Labor Day the campsites are not full. Mr. Lerude said that the campsites with full hook ups are generally full from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

Chairman Jamison asked Mr. Cox if he had any comments to add. Mr. Cox suggested that a deadline be established wherein if a Veteran has not reserved the allocated campsites, those campsite(s) be opened up to the general public therefore opening up the opportunity for the \$36-\$40 daily revenue.

Commissioner McGiffney said he does not think the Department is going to lose money, but he is concerned that we currently do not track how many campsites are used by veterans. Mr. Lerude said this information would be available going forward because specific campsites would be designated and held available.

Commissioner Faull said the reason the issue has come before them is that a veteran cannot currently make a reservation, and during busy season the campsites are full based on paid reservations. This has resulted in an exclusion of disabled veterans during the summer, because there are no campsites available on a first come first served basis.

Discussion took place regarding a potential loss in revenue, if normally \$40 campsites are filled with \$15 reservations. There is also a potential gain of revenue if a campsite is reserved by a veteran who previously would not have paid anything based on first come first served. Mr. Lerude said we will not know until we reserve specific campsites for veterans only. They currently purchase their lifetime pass, complete their form and cannot reserve nor do they pay a fee.

Commissioner Faull said that unless there is time, energy and maybe some money spent advertising this program to the disabled veteran community it may take several years for word to get out before the system is being utilized to the maximum. The first year will likely provide a ballpark number. Commissioner McGiffney said he believes we are talking about a small enough group that the word would get out pretty quickly.

Chairman Jamison said he did some research, and that the latest statistics for the State of California from 2010 report that there are 5.5 million disabled veterans in California.

Mr. Lerude said that the population using the County Veteran's Centers has dropped dramatically. The younger veterans are not utilizing the facilities, and there is no cost to do so. Commissioner McGiffney said he believes there is such a backlog in the VA System, that it will take five years or more for the actual number of disabled veterans to be updated and current.

Chairman Jamison asked Mr. Lerude what percentage the requested five (5) waterfront campsites with full hook-ups and five (5) non-waterfront campsites with full hook-ups would be of the total campsites available. Mr. Lerude said it would be about 15-20%.

Commissioner Park asked if this change would be complicated for the staff. Mr. Lerude said it would not be because the computer system would be set up accordingly. This would also allow for reporting of the information. Mr. Lerude reminded the Commission they can change the ordinance at this time, and after a year they can revisit the matter and make changes accordingly.

Chairman Jamison asked if the current lifetime pass is strictly for disabled veterans or for other groups. Mr. Cox said it is only for 100% disabled veterans. He also suggested in lieu of incurring advertising expenses, information be distributed to the local Veterans, Disabled American Veterans, and Veterans of Foreign War offices.

Commissioner McGiffney said that he feels setting aside 15-20% of the total campsites for only those veterans who are 100% disabled seems high. He said he would like to see any veteran that would like to camp given the opportunity to camp, even if they are not 100% disabled. He asked relative to total campers, what percentage are 100% disabled. Mr. Lerude said that is not information that is available, which is why he suggested setting aside a lower number of campsites and revisiting once more information is available.

Chairman Jamison asked if the proposed ten (10) days non-peak season and five (5) days peak season is within the current allowable days. Mr. Lerude said the proposed is more restrictive than the current maximum of fifteen (15) during peak season and thirty (30) during non-peak season. Mr. Lerude said these more restrictive allowances can also be established in the computer system.

Commissioner Faull said he is fully supportive of our disabled veterans and providing the service to them. He said in his experience working with State Parks where there was a disabled veterans pass, he saw very few individuals utilize the pass. Commissioner Faull asked if since this would require changing an ordinance, would it be possible to separate the fee portion from the management aspect of it; for instance the inclusion of flexible verbiage pertaining to how many campsites specifically will be set aside. This would avoid having to change the ordinance should the Commission revise the number of campsites to be set aside in the future. Mr. Lerude said he would find out from County Counsel if the number of campsites could be designated within a separate policy; however, he believes that the fee and the total number of days would require an ordinance change.

Commissioner Faull asked if there is also a reservation fee. Mr. Lerude said the current fee is \$7 per campsite for an entire reservation, and there is also a fee if a reservation is changed. These fees do not apply to a lifetime pass holder who comes in on a first come first served basis; only to those choosing to make a reservation..

Commissioner Faull suggested establishing a moving window in terms of when to release campsites versus having a set date each month. Mr. Lerude said that based on the proposal made by Mr. Cox, he personally believes there will be campsites that will go unused; however, only time will tell. This is something that the Commission can also establish.

Commissioner Faull said this issue is only addressing one park, and he would like to see it addressed more holistically to include some of the other County facilities and better serve our disabled veterans.

Commissioner Park suggested allowing all disabled veterans, not just those determined to be 100%. Mr. Lerude said that there is a certain requirement right now wherein the veteran has to show a card stating that they are 100% disabled. If the Commission would like to change that, it would require a change to the existing card. This is something that can be addressed, but it is not currently on the agenda. Commissioner Park said there may be a higher number of 50% disabled over 100% disabled veterans. Commissioner Faull said that the County is not alone in issuing the lifetime pass, and there is likely a benefit in keeping consistent with the standards that have been established. Commissioner Park clarified that a disabled veteran was not necessarily injured in combat.

Chairman Jamison asked Mr. Cox if he had any additional comments. Mr. Cox asked that a disabled veteran be able to make a reservation online just like anyone else. Commissioner McGiffney asked Mr. Cox how important the reduced fee is versus an allocation of campsites for only disabled veterans at the current rate. Mr. Cox said he does think the reduced rate would be perceived as a benefit to most veterans.

Mr. Lerude advised the Commission that they can address the fee, number of allocated campsites, and the seasonal limit in concept this evening; and he will address the formality of the ordinance change with County Counsel separately.

Mc-Fa Motion to accept Mr. Lerude's recommendation to allocate three (3) waterfront campsites with full hook-ups and three (3) non-waterfront campsites with full hook-ups, at a rate of \$15 per night, per campsite; with total maximum stays to coincide with the current maximum of up to fifteen (15) days during peak season March 15th through October 15th, and stays up to thirty-one (31) days during non-peak season from October 16th through March 14th for eligible disabled veterans. All ayes, motion carried.

Chairman Jamison thanked Mr. Cox for presenting the proposal and for attending the meeting.

3. Department Staff Report

Mr. Lerude said that one of the things the Department will be bringing to the Commission next month is a potential fee or annual pass for Hart Park. There are currently Park Rangers that monitor the alcohol permits that are purchased through the Department, so they could likely also monitor and enforce an annual pass. Doing so would avoid the initial concept discussed of having a kiosk set up, blocking roads, and potentially installing fences along with potential back up of

vehicles on Alfred Harrell Highway. Items to consider include whether the pass would be issued by vehicle, bicycle, etc. There are also parking issues to be considered.

Mr. Lerude said that also on the April agenda will be fee increases in other areas, which he believes to be non-controversial. These would be areas where fees have not been changed in many years, and a minimal increase is warranted.

Mr. Lerude said that the Certificates of Appreciation prepared at the request of Commissioner Park will be presented at the April meeting. He thanked Commissioner Park for donating frames for each of the certificates.

Mr. Lerude said that the Department took a 5% cut at the beginning of this fiscal year, and recently took an additional 1% cut. It is looking like they will take a cut in the neighborhood of 4-5% next fiscal year. The aggregate 10-11% cut is after the Department took cuts to reduce staff by 45% from the mid 2000's. The Department is looking further at privatization; has implemented phase 1 and are at the end of phases 2 and 3 privatization which may be implemented within the next thirty (30) days in the those remote areas of the south desert and on the west side of the County.

Mr. Lerude said that something else that will have an impact on the Department is water restrictions. The State has come forward with some water restrictions. Mr. Lerude said he received a call from the news media in the Kern River Valley inquiring about the water restriction. Mr. Lerude said the County has no jurisdiction over the issues of water even on their own facilities. It comes down to what the local water districts or agencies have in their plan for water restrictions. If there is no plan, the State guidelines must be followed. Last year some water districts based their guidelines on watering of odd/even days, while others based their guidelines on the total amount of watering time. Mr. Lerude said he met today with Dianne from the City of Bakersfield and Dave from North of the River to develop a consistent policy for the spray parks. The city water agency meets on April 15th, so more information will be available following that meeting. Potentially both pools and spray parks could be closed, which Mr. Lerude said are activities he believes the Board of Supervisors would like to see available during the summer months.

Mr. Lerude said County Counsel is currently working on the ordinance language for swimming at Lake Ming, which was passed by this Commission awhile back. The Department expects to bring the matter to the Board of Supervisors in the next month or two.

Lorraine Unger asked Mr. Lerude if he was involved in the Heritage Park "Take Back Our Park" community meeting, which was recently in the paper. Mr. Lerude said yes, the Department is working with Public Health. There was a public meeting at East Bakersfield Veteran's Building, wherein the local community

wanted to restrict the use of alcohol and smoking in the park. The Park Rangers have been enforcing these regulations at Heritage Park over the past year and a half. Mr. Lerude said there have been numerous arrests made for felony warrants and that numerous citations have also been issued. The Park Rangers are doing what they can, however this is a County Park located within the City of Bakersfield and therefore is within Bakersfield Police Department's jurisdiction. The next step will be to work with Public Health to seek potential grants to provide walking paths throughout the park, possibly watering stations. and other items that can be completed to take back the park. Mr. Lerude said the park is heavily used, and there are some big events held there from time to time. The boundaries of three different gangs go right through Heritage Park, so there are resulting gang and graffiti issues. The skate park is also used continuously.

Ms. Unger also asked Mr. Lerude if in light of what is going on with the Kern County Libraries, would the Parks Department be the next one to be privatized. Mr. Lerude said there is nothing in the State regulations that allows for privatization of the parks in general. The only thing allowed is to privatize remote locations for landscape maintenance and custodial, which was part of the phase 1 privatization plan covering Lost Hills, Wasco, Shafter, McFarland, and Delano. Phases 2 and 3 cover the south desert areas of Rosamond, California City, Mojave, Boron, North Edwards, Valley Acres, Derby Acres, Fellowes, and Ford City.

Chairman Jamison asked for Commission comments.

Commissioner Park shared that in the last meeting he and Commissioner Faull were delegated to speak with Supervisor Maggard; however, he called to make an appointment and he is not taking any appointments until May. Commissioner Park said that he will be out of the Country during the month of May.

4. Public Presentations

Lorraine Unger said she wanted to clarify a statement made by Mr. Lerude at the last meeting. He mentioned that there was a proposed whitewater park in the Kernville Area, and that the Sierra Club was suing on it. Ms. Unger said she investigated the matter and found there is no proposal coming through planning on a Whitewater Park; however the Sierra Club is doing an appeal on the Kern River Valley site specific plan which covers what used to be the Onyx Ranch. There is a proposal to take water out of the South Fork and move it to Orange County, which is part of their protest. Ms. Unger said they would most likely embrace a whitewater park if it's done properly. Mr. Lerude clarified that the Whitewater Park cannot go forward, per the Planning Department until that decision is made on the specific plan.

Bob Hawkins said that last year they found out the day before opening that there were no campfires allowed at the campground at Green Horn, while U.S. Forest Service campgrounds with no water and no restroom before opening did allow campfires. Mr. Hawkins asked if there was some way to alleviate this issue because it killed the revenue at Greenhorn last year. Mr. Lerude said he will follow up to see if he can find out if the restrictions will be put into place, but he feels they will be because of the drought. Mr. Hawkins said it would be nice if somebody came up and inspected the area before making a decision, because Green Horn is a campground with water, and is cleared of debris from the winter and it is kept clean the rest of the summer. Commissioner Park asked Mr. Hawkins how the water supply is. Mr. Hawkins said that a new well was put in and there is a lot more water than they have had in the past. Mr. Lerude said that was a project the County funded this past year. The Department will be working with the U.S. Forest Service to get out of the special use permit since the entire water system is on their property. The system was set up so that if the Forest Service needs water, we can tie our water right into their system so it can be used as an emergency back up

Travis Behrens from Mojave Little League distributed photos of a project the Commission agreed to allow them to do, which was to remove the parking lot, and re-grade it. The asphalt was buried just about the ground to allow for a solid footing where vehicles drive, the water was redirected to flow out of the park so that the little league field and the parking lot no longer flood.

Mr. Behrens distributed photos of the west field which was granted for another individual in town to paint and fix up; however that individual has not completed the project so he is requesting permission to finish the process as it has been over a year. Also included were photos of the bleachers that were painted at their field.

Mr. Behrens distributed a photo of the drinking fountain that still has not been repaired and is a safety issue on the field. The fountain is located behind the dugout but it is still on the playing field and is a hazard. A photo was also distributed of a concrete pipe that is covering the fountain making it a safe area, as well as a photo of the concrete pipe that was donated that the County is to saw in half to use to cover that. The supplies were donated to Mojave Little League, who donated them to the County and the project still has not been finished, and the start of the season is getting close.

Mr. Behrens distributed photos of the parking lot outside of the baseball field. The County authorized the parking lot to be fixed on the other side of the park; however, with the spray park being on the same side of the park as the baseball field that parking lot is used a lot more. The State of California along with the County and the Mojave Unified School District removed the crossing guards along Highway 58, and installed one crossing guard with flashing lights with a

center median area for pedestrians to congregate in. This was completed as a result of a female who was hit by a vehicle commuting to the airport and lost her life. Mr. Behrens said he would like to see the County resurface the parking lot because it does get more use.

Mr. Behrens distributed photos of the west field. Mr. Behrens said he previously proposed to install lights on the field and do some rehabilitation on the field. Unfortunately some grant funding fell through on the lighting, but they would still like to move forward on the field rehabilitation up which would be free of charge. Mr. Behrens said he is in the negotiations with purchasing the top soil dirt, which would go over the underlayment dirt. They are planning to remove 3 inches of the base, roll the remaining base; bring in the underlayment of the dirt, then lay the ball field dirt to complete the field. The last photo was of the last of the dead trees, and Mr. Behrens thanked Mr. Lerude and his staff for cutting down all of the dead trees that were around the outside of the park, as it does make it look a lot better.

Mr. Lerude said that he would follow up with Mr. Behrens on the project that was not completed by the other group, and that he is willing to have his Department take it on.

Mr. Lerude confirmed that OHV funding will be covered at the April 22nd meeting.

5. Commission Comments

Commissioner Park thanked the public for attending the meeting.

Commissioner Faull also thanked the public for attending. He said it is important that they attend and keep the Commission updated with things going on in the field with specific facilities.

Commissioner McGiffney also thanked the public for attending. The Commission is always looking for ways to help maximize our recreation facilities and honor whatever privileges the public has.

Chairman Jamison reminded the public we are discussing items that are not on the agenda. There were no further comments.

6. Date and Location of Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for April 22, 2015 at the Public Services Building.

8. Adjournment

Chairman Jamison adjourned the meeting at 8:04 p.m.