

Lompoc City Council Agenda Item

City Council Meeting Date: March 4, 2008



TO: Gary P. Keefe, City Administrator

FROM: Stacy L. Lawson, Senior Environmental Coordinator
s_lawson@ci.lompoc.ca.us

SUBJECT: City Council consideration of support of a collaborative effort to request Vandenberg Air Force Base and the U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service allow increased general public access to Surf and Ocean Beaches.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the City Council consider the attached letter of support, direct staff to make any desired changes, and direct staff to submit the letter to Santa Barbara County's Board of Supervisors.

BACKGROUND:

Vandenberg Air Force Base's (VAFB's) Surf Beach, Ocean Beach, Wall Beach, and Minuteman Beach have been identified as having some of the best habitat for Western Snowy Plover breeding and nesting, listed as a federally threatened species since 1993. In 2001, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a Draft Biological Opinion on VAFB's proposed Snowy Plover Management Plan, concluding that implementation of the proposed management plan would likely result in a Jeopardy finding.

The Draft Opinion required the closure of Surf and Ocean Beaches with the exception of ½ mile on Surf Beach, with public access from the existing parking lot and trail, during the Western Snowy Plover's breeding season, March 1 – September 31. Ocean Beach was required to be closed year-round. This plan was acceptable only if staffing was available for two patrol officers during the week and three patrol officers during weekends. If staffing was not adequate to meet these requirements, then one or more beaches would need to be fully closed and a single staff member assigned to patrol the area. If more than ten violations occurred, additional patrol staff would be required.

VAFB chose the first option, leaving ½ mile of Surf Beach open to the public during the plover's nesting season. Dogs are no longer allowed on the beach and all trash and food must be removed when users leave. Predator control and vegetation management to enhance Snowy Plover habitat were also required.

During the ten years restrictions have been in place, the population of snowy plovers has not increased significantly. At the end of 2007 the birds numbered 170, an increase of only 92 adult birds over the 78 that were present in 1998. The recovery criteria established by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service has not been met at this time.

DISCUSSION:

Supervisor Joni Gray (5th District) has requested the City Council's support in pursuing a full re-opening of Surf and Ocean Beaches on the basis that the closures have affected Lompoc long enough.

While it is unclear whether such a re-opening or relaxation of restrictions on Surf or Ocean Beach is possible or likely under federal law, it is clear that the community has historically used and enjoyed these beaches. It is also clear any management alternative that would allow additional public access to these beaches would be applauded by many.

Stacy L. Lawson, Senior Environmental Coordinator

Attachment:

1. [Letter of Support](#)

APPROVED FOR SUBMITTAL TO THE CITY ADMINISTRATOR:

Arleen T. Pelster, AICP, Community Development Director

APPROVED FOR SUBMITTAL TO THE CITY COUNCIL:

Gary P. Keefe, City Administrator