

March 4, 2008

Brooks Firestone, Chair
Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors
105 East Anapamu Street
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Dear Mr. Firestone:

Recently, Supervisor Joni Gray raised the issue of whether Surf and Ocean Beaches could be reopened to the public, as public access has been significantly restricted for the past ten years. Supervisor Gray has asked for the City of Lompoc's support in joining with the Board of Supervisors to request a re-opening of these beaches to the public.

As you are aware, Surf and Ocean Beaches are located on Vandenberg Air Force Base (VAFB) and Western Snowy Plover recovery efforts are required by, and monitored by, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Once the Western Snowy Plover was designated a federally threatened species, VAFB was required to take measures to protect the Snowy Plover's breeding and nesting habitat. Linear beach restrictions and subsequently, full beach restrictions on all but ½ mile of Surf Beach, were implemented. Any changes to the current Plover Management Program need to be approved by the USFWS and VAFB.

That said, there is no doubt that Surf and Ocean Beaches provide the closest ocean shoreline access to the residents of the Lompoc Valley. Lompoc Valley residents enjoyed uninterrupted access to these beaches for many years, prior to 1993. Alternative beaches, such as Jalama Beach and the Guadalupe Dunes are an hour or more distant. Frequently, travelers come from southern and central California looking for shoreline access at Surf Beach, only to be told that access is restricted during the most popular summer months.

The City of Lompoc believes that the public access limitations applied to Surf and Ocean Beaches have significantly restricted shoreline access for residents who do not have the necessary funds for gasoline or the time needed to travel to a more distant beach. With these impacts in mind, the City of Lompoc would support a collaborative effort between the Board of Supervisors, the City, VAFB and the USFWS to re-examine the current Western Snowy Plover Management Plan on Vandenberg Air Force Base.

On April 21, 2006, the USFWS, in response to a petition for delisting of the Pacific Coast population of the Western Snowy Plover by the Surf-Ocean Beach Commission of Lompoc, CA, the USFWS made the determination that the Pacific Coast population is a distinct population and denied the petition, but drafted a proposed Rule 4(d) finding that could allow for increased public use of Plover habitat in areas where recovery efforts were succeeding. This proposed rule was noticed for comment, but has never been finalized. The proposed rule would allow Pacific Coast Counties, where the population of Western Snowy Plover meets stipulated criteria, to petition the USFWS for revised status within six months of the adoption of the 4(d) rule, potentially allowing expanded access to areas where Western Snowy Plover's are found. The City of Lompoc would support an inquiry into why this proposed 4(d) rule has never been finalized.

In addition, the City would support a cooperative inquiry into the effectiveness of current protective measures used at Surf and Ocean Beaches, as compared with methods used elsewhere to manage Western Snowy Plover habitat. A comparative evaluation of Western Snowy Plover population levels between Surf and Ocean Beaches and other beaches using management methods that do not require full beach closure may provide important information in reassessing the provisions of the current Western Snowy Plover Management Plan.

Sincerely,

Dick DeWees,
Mayor, City of Lompoc

cc: Lompoc City Council
Col. Stephen Tanous, 30th Space Wing Commander,
Vandenberg Air Force Base