



Agenda Item 17a.
Application Number: A-2-SON-13-0219
Michele Luna, Executive Director
Neutral

Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods

Preservation through Education & Stewardship
Russian River Sector State Parks

April 7, 2016

Dear State Coastal Commission Commissioners,

Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods, is a State Park Cooperating Association that supports 3 state parks including Sonoma Coast State Park in the Sonoma Mendocino Coast District. We have a membership of over 800 and support 300 State Park volunteers who provide education and stewardship programs in our parks.

We advocate for our State Parks and the dedicated staff that do their best to uphold the State Park mission despite the challenges they face with a diminished budget and a shortage of staff at the District and unit levels.

In 2009, Governor Schwarzenegger proposed charging parking fees at Sonoma Coast State Park. The Natural Resources Agency has passed down this mandate to the Department of Parks and Recreation.

State Park staff in our district have been directed to spend countless hours developing this proposal to charge parking fees at Sonoma Coast State Park.

There is no doubt that more funding is needed to provide the services needed in our parks. Right now there are only three State Park maintenance workers covering the workload at Sonoma Coast State Park. There are only two State Park environmental scientists responsible for 27,000 acres of land in our sector of the Sonoma Mendocino Coast District. Our State Park lifeguards risk their lives regularly to save people on our dangerous coastline. They get frustrated when they can't be everywhere at one time and a fatality occurs as a result.

Many people in our community understand this dilemma and are willing to support their parks. In 2010, Proposition 21 (the vehicle license fee initiative) passed in Sonoma County, however it did not pass statewide. The majority of our community was willing help fund their parks with a \$17 annual fee. As you can see, this community is not supportive of charging parking fees to access our coastline.

This is evidenced by the fact that on busy days at Armstrong Redwoods, visitors park up to 1.5 miles away from the picnic area to avoid paying parking fees. These same visitors who walk into Armstrong Redwoods dropped over \$17,000 into our donation box at the park entrance in 2015. People are willing to support their parks when they know the money will be used locally.

If this proposal to charge parking fees goes through, it will be park staff and volunteers who will be saddled with interacting with the public when they protest and do everything they can to avoid paying fees, including parking in unsafe areas for themselves and the natural resources.

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Stewards and many of our colleague organizations are doing our part to support our local State Parks. Since 2011, Stewards has been paying to keep the Visitor Center and restrooms open in Jenner. In 2012, we stepped up to keep Austin Creek State Recreation Area open and provide visitor services in Armstrong Redwoods. We have increased camping revenue in Austin Creek by over \$60,000 a year since 2012. The volunteers that Stewards supports give over 13,000 hours a year and come in contact with over 110,000 park visitors annually. We are dedicated to supporting yours, mine and our State Parks.

Stewards is appealing to you as Commissioners to help us convince the Governor and the legislature to do their part to find a sustainable funding source for our struggling State Park system. If everyone in this room devoted time and energy to supporting a viable proposal, our State Parks could become a well-funded system that we could all feel proud of. Please join us in building a future where our parks are open and thriving, natural and cultural resources are protected, and high quality recreational opportunities are accessible for all people, no matter their economic situation.

Sincerely,



Michele Luna
Executive Director