

## **JALAMA BEACH COUNTY PARK**

### **A Park in Transition**

#### SUMMARY

Despite its popularity, all is not well with Jalama Beach County Park. The Grand Jury found that the County does not receive sufficient revenue from RV and trailer rentals at the park, the concessionaire contract is awarded without bids, the absence of a reservation system inconveniences potential visitors, and the Parks Department has made no visible progress on expansion plans.

Jalama Beach County Park is located in one of the most isolated areas on the California coastline, and has been a favorite camping area for the local community for more than 50 years. The park facilities consist of 110 camping sites, each equipped with a barbeque pit and picnic table. Of the sites, 28 offer electrical hook-ups. Camping sites are rented on a daily basis. Also available are 105 day-use parking spaces for access to the beach and ocean.

For the past 26 years, the current concessionaire has had an exclusive contract to operate a general store for the sale of food, beverages, supplies and related beach equipment. In October 2004, the contract was amended to permit the concessionaire to rent trailers as part of the concession. Other parties provide camping equipment as well. The Grand Jury believes that the County of Santa Barbara should derive revenue from these added business activities.

**SYNOPSIS**  
**JALAMA BEACH COUNTY PARK**  
*A County Park in Transition*

Despite its popularity, all is not well with Jalama Beach County Park. The Grand Jury found that the County does not receive sufficient revenue from RV and trailer rentals at the park, the concessionaire contract is awarded without bids, the absence of a reservation system inconveniences potential visitors, and the Parks Department has made no visible progress on expansion plans.

Jalama Beach County Park is located along one of the most isolated areas on the California coastline. The park facilities consist of 110 camping sites and 105 day-use parking spaces. A concessionaire provides the park with food, supplies, and trailer rental services. The park is reached by driving a curving two-lane road, 14 miles from US Hwy 1 via Jalama Road to the coast. The park does not have a reservation system, and the only notice of the park's status is located just after turning off Hwy 1 on Jalama Road. This notice is electrical and is manually activated.

The concessionaire has operated at the park for 26 years and is in the second ten-year renewal of its concession contract. In 2004 an amendment was granted allowing the concessionaire to rent trailers. This amendment did not specify the number of trailers that may be rented.

The County has renewed the concessionaire's agreement two times for a period of ten years for each renewal. This policy of long-term renewal without securing public bids is problematic. There is no way the County can be sure it is obtaining the best possible agreement, and the process opens the County to charges of inside dealing.

The use of the park has increased in recent years. During the most recent five-year period, the park has averaged annual attendance of 145,500 visitors. Revenues have increased substantially. Park rangers estimate that the demand is about 30% above current capacity during the summer months of June through September. This is the same period that the beaches in Lompoc are closed for the annual mating of the endangered Snowy Plover, which may be aggravating an already heavy visitor load on the park.

In 1999 the Parks Department developed the Jalama Master Plan. This plan provides for an expansion of the park and a significant increase in the number of RV and trailer sites and a substantial increase in the number of day-use parking spaces. The Parks Department has not made any advancement on the plan since it was first developed. The Parks Department should allocate time and effort to get this plan activated, as the over-crowding of the facility will only get worse. This situation and the lack of a reservation system leave the public poorly served.

**County Parks Department's Response**

**Recommendation 1:** The 2006 concession contract should provide for RV rentals in addition to trailer rentals with consideration given to a new concession fee arrangement for RV and trailer rentals.

**Response:** **The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.** The Parks Department has already taken steps to address this recommendation. The Department's new Concession Solicitation and Selection Policy, which was approved by the Board of Supervisors on June 6, 2006, responds to this recommendation by providing a means by which the County can receive competitive proposals for a variety of services provided by the Jalama Beach store concessionaire, when this concession comes up for renewal in October 2006, including RV and travel trailer rentals. Prospective concessionaires will have an opportunity, through the bid process contained in this new policy, to propose if and how they would provide RV and/or trailer rentals as part of the concession, as well as the proposed fee arrangement with the County.

**Recommendation 2:** Award of the concession should be open, based on a Request for Proposals (RFP), or bid process, with concession fees based on market rates.

**Response:** **The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.** The Parks Department's new Concession Solicitation and Selection Policy, which was approved by the Board of Supervisors on June 6, 2006, responds to this recommendation. Through the open, competitive bid process contained in this policy, the County will be able to select concessionaires for *all* of its concessions, including the Jalama Beach store concession. The concession fees will be based on market rates, among other factors that will be considered as part of the bid process for this concession when it comes up for renewal in October 2006.

**Recommendation 3:** Off-park-site equipment providers should be required to pay concession fees if such providers deliver equipment to the park.

**Response:** **The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted.** The Parks Department is unaware of any outside providers delivering equipment to the park on a routine basis. Jalama Beach campers arrive from various locations throughout the state and utilize many different means by which to camp. For example, should a camper rent a motor home in Los Angeles and drive to Jalama Beach, the County cannot be expected to receive compensation from the motor home operator, nor would the County even be aware of the transaction. The rental arrangement between an outside operator and a camper prior to arriving at the park is not within the County's purview, whereas, a concessionaire doing business within the park and offering trailer rentals as part of its services would be subject to the terms of the concession contract.

**Recommendation 4:** The Parks Department should implement a reservation system.

**Response: The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.** The Parks Department is currently working on developing an advance reservation system for its two camping parks: Jalama Beach and Cachuma Lake. The Department is in the process of collecting demographic information to assist in the development and design of the system. Development of an advance reservation system for the camping parks was identified as a key action item for implementation during FY 2006-07, as part of the Department's strategic planning process.

**Recommendation 5:** The County should enforce its concession agreements.

**Response: The recommendation has been implemented.** The County does (and will continue to) enforce its concession agreements. Whenever the Parks Department becomes aware of an inconsistency or deviation from the terms of a concession agreement, staff takes the appropriate action to ensure the concessionaire is in full compliance with the agreement. As a case in point, the Department actually became aware through a complaint (prior to the Grand Jury's inquiry) that the concessionaire may have been acting outside the parameters of the agreement with regard to the travel trailer rentals. The Department immediately investigated the complaint and informed the concessionaire, in writing, that he was out of compliance and must take action to remedy the situation. Staff observation and/or public complaints are the usual means by which the Department becomes aware of violations of concession agreements.

**Recommendation 6:** The concessionaire should be limited to a specific number of trailers that can be rented.

**Response: The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future.** The Parks Department agrees that this recommendation should be implemented as part of the terms of the next concession agreement for the Jalama store when it comes up for renewal in October 2006 should the concessionaire wish to offer trailer rental services.

**Recommendation 7:** The Board of Supervisors should give priority to the implementation of the Jalama Beach Park Master Plan.

**Response: The recommendation has been implemented.** In 1999, the Board of Supervisors approved the Preliminary Master Plan for Jalama Beach County Park for purposes of commencing review of the plan under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Master Plan includes improvements to the main park area as well as other improvements on private lands that were envisioned to come under County ownership at some future date. The private property owner, the Bixby Ranch Company, worked cooperatively with the Parks Department in the development of new uses proposed on Bixby Ranch property. The development envisioned in the Master Plan was to occur over a 20-year period, with improvements within the existing park anticipated to occur as existing facilities reached the end of their depreciated life and/or became necessary to replace. The Master Plan proposes phased development, as some aspects of reorganization and expansion of the park are contingent on other phases occurring first – e.g., the ranger residences must be relocated and reconstructed prior to any expansion of camping within the existing ranger residence area.

During the preparation of the Negative Declaration for the Master Plan, the Parks Department was advised by the County's Planning & Development Department that certain aspects of the project description, primarily the development of a new day use parking area, a beach access trail, relocation of the entrance kiosk, and creation of short-term parking on private lands, would require their removal from Agricultural Preserve/Williamson Act contract status. Negotiations then began between Bixby Ranch and the County to determine how this would occur. Several meetings took place between Bixby and County representatives between 2000 and 2004. In mid-2005, the Bixby Ranch Company placed a portion of its lands on the market for sale. At the same time, the County was informed by Bixby representatives that negotiations for acquisition and development of park improvements would cease until such time as the County could discuss land negotiations with the new property owner. It is the Parks Department's understanding that the property is still on the market for sale at this time. Other improvements that have occurred at the park, in preparation of the Master Plan implementation, include negotiations with Vandenberg Air Force Base for a secondary water supply that would provide a stable and reliable water source for existing and proposed improvements at the park. On May 2, 2006, the Board of Supervisors approved the expenditure of \$60,000 in Chevron mitigation fee funds towards this effort. The Master Plan includes improvements to the existing Jalama Beach store and snackbar area. These improvements will be subject to any new lease negotiations for the Jalama Beach store concession.