

## **Investigation Update New Parks Department**

The 1995/96 Ventura County Grand Jury reviewed the Recreation Services response to the 1994/95 Grand Jury recommendation that Recreation Services become an independent department. In addition, major changes are being implemented by the Board of Supervisors in 1996.

### **BACKGROUND**

Since 1986 the Recreation Enterprise Fund (Parks and Harbor) has been part of the General Services Agency (GSA). Profits from Channel Islands Harbor operations have been used to subsidize County Parks. Of the County-operated Parks, only Rincon Parkway (beach campsites) is currently profitable. Creation of an independent County Harbor Department is being linked to development of a GSA Parks Department, which is intended to become financially independent within 5 years.

### **PROCEDURES FOLLOWED**

- Reviewed the GSA proposal "Reorganization of GSA Recreation Services and Creation of County Harbor Department," submitted to the Board of Supervisors April 16, 1996.
- Reviewed further GSA recommendations to, and actions by the Board of Supervisors.
- Visited Channel Islands Harbor, and met with the Manager and the Harbor Patrol Captain.
- Made unannounced visits to 10 County Parks, and met with various personnel at these Parks.
- Interviewed the GSA Deputy Director for Recreation Services and the Parks Manager.
- Observed meetings of the Board of Supervisors where Recreation Services proposals were presented and discussed.

### **FINDINGS**

- Because additional management time and money are required as Channel Islands Harbor redevelopment and growth plans are implemented, a separate Harbor Department will become effective July 1, 1996. The Director will report to the Board of Supervisors and the Chief Administrative Officer.
- The Board of Supervisors adopted the recommendations that "the existing Parks and Harbor Commission will remain in place for an appropriate period of time to evaluate the subsidy transition between the Harbor and the Parks." The Parks Department will continue in the GSA, and receive a subsidy of \$1 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 1996/97. Future years' subsidies will be adjusted according to the amount of new revenues generated in the Parks Department.
- The current Deputy Director for Recreation plans to continue with the Parks Department, which is undertaking major projects to become self-sufficient in the next 5 years. Currently, about \$3.5 million is spent annually, and \$2.5 million is received from rent and

fees.

- Park rates are established each November by the Board of Supervisors for the following year.
- Recreation Services has taken the first steps toward lease arrangements for developments at Toland Park and Camarillo Regional Park.
- For FY 1996-97, the Reorganization will result in net savings of \$190,500, due to a net reduction of 5 positions.
- One function listed by Recreation Services for 1995/96 is to "Market and promote recreational facilities at Harbor and regional parks."
- The Cultural Heritage Board, for which Recreation Services provides staff support, is being transferred to the Resource Management Agency, Planning Division. There will be an annual subsidy of \$30,000 from the Harbor Department.
- Dennison Park, adjacent to California Highway 150, was renovated and reopened in November 1995, after being closed for eight years.

#### COMMENDATIONS

- Although the 1994/95 Grand Jury recommendation was not adopted, GSA made and is making significant progress in addressing the core issue.
- In the fall of 1995, the Cultural Heritage Board published *Ventura County Historical Landmarks and Points of Interest*, which gives excellent background on many points of historic interest throughout the County.
- Renovation and reopening of Dennison Park under the direction of Lions Clubs International, the new Lessee, is a fine example of community effort.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

The 1995/96 Grand Jury recommends:

1. The Parks Department provide an annual Guide to Beaches and Parks, including rates and a map, early in each calendar year. Circulation of the brochure should include the County Fair booth, Chambers of Commerce, motels and hotels (as customary) plus magazines and other media venues. Map providers such as the Automobile Club of Southern California need continuing updates on Parks.
2. The Parks Department increase public awareness of each County park with upgraded on-site signs, current information and media promotion.
3. The Parks Department reconsider the deletion of office personnel, maintenance workers and a ranger, in anticipation of expanded operations and increased usage.
4. The Board of Supervisors establish a target date for the Parks Advisory Commission and the Harbor Advisory Commission to take effect.

RESPONSE REQUIRED

Board of Supervisors

Ventura County Recreation Services/Parks Department