

Investigation Update Steckel Park

The 1995/96 Ventura County Grand Jury reviewed the Recreation Services response to concerns noted in the 1994/95 Grand Jury Final Report. The Grand Jury also:

- Visited the day use portion, which is operated by the County and the overnight camping portion, which is operated by a Lessee.
- Reviewed the Steckel Park lease, met with Recreation Services and reviewed materials provided.
- Met with the Lessee and two staff members and reviewed materials provided.

FINDINGS

- Steckel Park is located north of Santa Paula on the east side of California Highway 150.
- The 1994/95 Grand Jury recommended that restrooms be built to expand the area open for day use. The County opens sections as reservations are received. Special permits are issued for large groups. In lieu of building restrooms, the County has found that portable toilets are cost effective in seldom used areas.
- Signs at the aviary are decrepit.
- A higher standard of cleanliness in the overnight camping area was recommended, but clutter was still observed.
- Enforcement of the 180 day limit in the overnight camping area was recommended. Only the on-site employees known as Hosts and the Lessee now stay that long, as permitted in the lease.
- The Lessee has recently planted oleanders and trees. Plans are underway for a pool.
- The promotional materials provided by the Lessee are attractive and informative. An accompanying map of southern Ventura County is generally helpful, but does not mention or locate Steckel Park.
- The County road through the camping area presents problems. Speeding vehicles, not related to the park, endanger campers. The high profile presence of Hosts has helped. When residents along the County road were given the option several years ago to change the road from public ownership to private ownership, it is reported that they turned it down.
- Speed bumps are a problem for Public Works in view of a lawsuit where breakage resulted. Erosion beside part of the road is an ongoing concern.

COMMENDATIONS

- Steckel Park is well designed to allow public enjoyment of its natural beauty. Santa Paula Creek provides an appropriate boundary between the day use and camping portions.

- The aviary in the day use portion offers a special attraction.
- In general, the day use facilities are good, suitable and well maintained.
- The Lessee provides conscientious planning and management.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The 1995/96 Ventura County Grand Jury recommends that Recreation Services/Parks Department:

1. Make new signs for the aviary a priority project.
2. Direct the Lessee to use a promotional map which locates Steckel Park and possibly other County Parks.
3. Urge the Lessee to make campsite cleanups more frequent, as recommended by the 1994/95 Grand Jury.
4. Actively seek resolution of road concerns with Public Works. Posting speed limit signs with regular enforcement may be the best control for speeding vehicles.

RESPONSE REQUIRED

Recreation Services/Parks Department