

The San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

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Animals & Ethics

Executive Summary

FYI

**Objections to the Federal Government's Ban on
Off-Leash Dogs at Ocean Beach**

January 9, 1997

The San Francisco SPCA objects strongly to the arbitrary and capricious actions of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) in banning off-leash dogs at Ocean Beach. This ban unfairly punishes dogs, wrongfully discriminates against responsible pet owners, and does nothing to remedy the plight of the threatened snowy plover.

On the pretext of protecting the threatened snowy plover, the GGNRA has declared that it will use coercive measures to enforce an off-leash dog ban at Ocean Beach.

The dog ban . . . ignores the real culprits: Human activities, including crowds and All-Terrain-Vehicles, were shown in a GGNRA study to correspond to drops of 50 to 100 percent in the number of plovers on Ocean Beach. At the same time, sand excavation projects displaced the entire Ocean Beach plover population from its primary roosting area for over a month last winter, and the Cape Mohican oil spill last October was responsible for oiling one third of all plovers present on the beach, with potentially tragic results.

The dog ban . . . punishes those who cause no harm: Out of 5,692 dogs observed during a one-and-a-half-year study by the GGNRA, less than one third of one percent chased plovers, and none ever caught or harmed one. An even smaller number "inadvertently" disturbed plovers, causing them to walk, run, or sometimes fly out of reach. There is no evidence such "disturbances" have any negative effect on plovers, who have been reported to fly over 1,000 kilometers from breeding sites and up to 50 kilometers between wintering sites.

The dog ban . . . will not result in more plovers on Ocean Beach: GGNRA officials have publicly acknowledged that the off-leash ban will have no effect on the number of plovers frequenting Ocean Beach. And, with this admission, the GGNRA denies the public any means of evaluating its actions and places itself beyond the constraints of public accountability.

The dog ban . . . disregards the clear evidence that dogs and plovers coexist harmoniously: Since 1979--the same year off-leash dog walking was officially sanctioned at Ocean Beach-- the number of plovers on the beach has increased over 100 percent, according to the GGNRA's own study.

The dog ban . . . violates basic notions of due process and public

participation rights: The GGNRA made its decision to ban off-leash dogs over a year and a half ago without providing any public notice, holding any public hearings, or allowing any public participation whatsoever. At the first and only "informational meeting" held three weeks ago, the GGNRA confirmed that its decision was final, that the decision would not be reconsidered or modified as a result of public comment or testimony, and that it would be enforced with coercive measures.

The dog ban . . . is a symptom of bureaucratic incoherence and

disarray in protecting threatened species: *The GGNRA has refused to consider the option of constructing a fence to protect the Ocean Beach plovers—a solution that would provide protection from off-road vehicles, bulldozers, joggers, horseback riders, etc., and still allow off-leash dog walking to continue in non-fenced areas. Astonishingly, the reason GGNRA officials gave for rejecting this option was that it might encourage Snowy Plovers to breed on Ocean Beach and thereby result in more of these rare birds frequenting our shores!*

With no rational basis for its actions and no intelligible plan for helping snowy plovers, the GGNRA has cast profound doubt on the effectiveness and integrity of the government's efforts to protect threatened species and manage park resources without discrimination or bias. If the federal government truly believes the western snowy plover is in need of protection, then we believe the GGNRA should complete a thorough and objective study of all the factors that affect Ocean Beach plovers, open the process to public review and comment, and develop a coherent and effective plan to aid in the recovery of these rare and wonderful birds. Nor would we object, if the GGNRA considers the plover population to be in imminent danger, to the government's imposing a ban on all recreational and other activities in the affected areas of Ocean Beach, until a general management plan can be developed. As it now stands, however, the ban on off-leash dogs appears to be nothing more than an arbitrary and capricious exercise of power by a bureaucracy that has used the plight of the snowy plover as a pretext for taking hostile measures against dogs and ousting responsible pet owners from public lands.

Attachments:

- *Objections to the Federal Government's Ban on Off-Leash Dogs at Ocean Beach. January 9, 1996. Report by The San Francisco SPCA.*
- *Appendix I--San Francisco SPCA letter to GGNRA, dated March 31, 1995, objecting to off-leash ban and calling for public hearings.*
- *Appendix II--The Value of Dogs to Society*
- *Appendix III--What You Can Do*

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Objections to the Federal Government's Ban on Off-Leash Dogs at Ocean Beach

January 9, 1997

The San Francisco SPCA believes all animals, whether wild or domestic, are equally entitled to our respect, concern, and compassion. We also believe each is entitled to a fair share of the natural resources necessary to preserve its well-being and ensure its survival. We recognize that in some cases the needs of one species may require that others give up a share of natural resources. In weighing these different interests, we feel that balance and fairness are essential for a just resolution. Where the loss to one species is great, the corresponding need should be equally compelling. And no species should be asked to give up vital habitat and essential natural resources without such a demonstration. To burden one creature without benefiting another is, in our eyes, misguided and wrong.

Because of these beliefs, we strongly object to the decision of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) to shut down Ocean Beach to off-leash dogs--ostensibly to protect the threatened western snowy plover. This decision, made without any evidence of harm by off-leash dogs and without any opportunity for public participation, unfairly punishes dogs and their owners and does little or nothing to remedy the plight of plovers. Even the GGNRA's own post hoc study--released a year and a half after the decision to ban off-leash dogs was made--fails to provide any rational basis for the government's actions. *The GGNRA's refusal to consider genuine steps to protect the plover and enhance nesting and breeding opportunities, only serves to cast further doubt on the effectiveness and integrity of its efforts to protect these rare birds and manage park resources without discrimination or bias.*

I. Ocean Beach: Vital Off-Leash Area for Generations

Ocean Beach has served as an off-leash dog exercise area for decades--and well before the arrival of the GGNRA. In our densely populated urban environment, off-leash areas are essential for the health and well-being of our pets, and Ocean Beach is among the few remaining places in our City where dogs can socialize freely and run off the energy they've built up from having been confined in houses and apartments. Recognizing the importance of this area to responsible pet ownership in our region, the Golden Gate National Recreation Area Advisory Commission officially sanctioned the off-leash policy nearly 20 years ago, when it issued the 1979 Approved Guidelines for a Pet Policy.

Since then, tens of thousands of dog owners throughout the San Francisco Bay Area have come to depend on the off-leash area at Ocean Beach. Flanked to the south by high bluffs that make the beach below off-limits to all but the hardiest hikers and to the north by a heavily used recreational beach, this two-mile stretch was one of the few readily accessible beaches on our coast where dogs were able to run, play, and frolic with their families. It has been called "a dog's dream come true" and even received a "four paws" rating in the California Dog Lovers' Companion¹--a comprehensive guide to dog parks throughout the State. For all who came to Ocean Beach with their dogs--from the children whose canine companions are treasured confidantes, to the elderly whose dogs provide a sense of security, affection, and companionship--it has been a vital place, enabling dog owners to provide responsible care in return for the unconditional love they receive.

II. History of GGNRA Action to Ban Off-Leash Dogs

During this entire time, Ocean Beach has also provided wintering habitat several months each year for western snowy plovers who arrive after breeding and nesting on other Pacific coast beaches and inland habitats. On March 5, 1993, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service ("USFWS") listed the coastal population of the western snowy plover (as distinct from the larger interior population in California and Nevada) as *threatened*.²

Two years later, on March 2, 1995, the USFWS issued its proposed designation of critical habitat for the western snowy plover, which included several nesting areas along the Pacific coast from Washington to California.³ While Ocean Beach was not designated as critical habitat, the GGNRA informed San

¹ Maria Goodavage, The California Dog Lover's Companion, Foghorn Press, 1994. p. 419

² 58 Fed. Reg. 12684-12874 (1993).

³ 60 Fed. Reg. 11768-11809 (1995).

Francisco SPCA representatives on March 27, 1995, that a two-mile stretch of Ocean Beach would be off limits to off-leash dogs. No other activities were said to be targeted for bans or restrictions, including jogging, beach walking, horseback riding, bicycling, off-road vehicle driving, or bulldozing--all of which also occur on Ocean Beach. We wrote to GGNRA officials immediately to object to the ban and call for adequate public notice and a meaningful opportunity for the public to comment and be heard. A copy of our letter is attached at Appendix I.

At that time the GGNRA had just initiated a study on Ocean Beach plovers, although the public was not informed either of the fact of the study or of its nature and scope. A year and a half later, on November 16, 1996, the GGNRA released the preliminary results of the study.⁴ Although the USFWS identified more than seven factors that might affect the wintering habitat of western snowy plovers, the bulk of the GGNRA study is devoted to off-leash dogs.

On December 16, 1996, a month after issuing its study, the GGNRA held an "informational meeting" for concerned Ocean Beach dog walkers and other members of the public. At that meeting, dog walkers expressed their commitment to working with the GGNRA to protect snowy plovers. They asked that the GGNRA reconsider its blanket ban in favor of a cooperative effort and offered to assist with public education, clean-up, and other measures to help the plovers. The dog walkers also offered to evaluate the results of these cooperative efforts within one year and take further steps, if necessary. The GGNRA responded that its decision to ban off-leash dogs was final, that the decision would not be reconsidered or modified as a result of public comment or testimony, and that GGNRA enforcement officials would begin using coercive measures to enforce the ban on January 1, 1997.

III. GGNRA Study Contradicts Its Position on Off-Leash Dogs

In light of the dramatic change in the historic use of Ocean Beach as an off-leash area, and in light of the GGNRA's unyielding attitude, we might have expected the GGNRA's study to present a compelling case for the necessity of such a draconian ban. We were shocked, therefore, to find that the GGNRA's own study seriously undermines--indeed, it appears to flatly contradict--the GGNRA's position that banning off-leash dogs is necessary to protect the plovers. According to the study, since the off-leash policy was officially sanctioned in 1979, **there has been an increase of more than 100 percent in the**

⁴ Hatch, Daphne A. Western Snowy Plover (A Federally Threatened Species) Wintering Population and Interaction with Human Activity on Ocean Beach, San Francisco, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, 1988 through 1996. November 16, 1996. GGNRA, National Park Service. *Further references to this study are followed by page numbers in the text.*

number of snowy plovers frequenting Ocean Beach (pp. 7, 8). Even dog “rush hours” don’t seem to faze the plovers—at least, GGNRA observers and analysts couldn’t find any negative relationship between the number of dogs on the beach at a given time and the number of plovers on the beach at the same time (pp. 10, 13). Faced with these results, GGNRA officials twice acknowledged at the December 16 “informational meeting” that the off-leash ban would have no effect on the number of plovers on Ocean Beach.⁵

Unable to make its case on the basis of plover numbers, the GGNRA focuses on plover “disturbances.” Charts presented to the public and highlighted in the GGNRA study graphically illustrate its observations that six percent of dogs on Ocean Beach chased birds (Figure 13). Only upon careful reading, however, is it revealed that “[i]n most cases, dogs chased gulls and shorebirds other than plovers” (p. 11). In fact, in the entire year-and-a-half study, only 19 out of a total of 5,692 dogs—**less than one third of one percent**—were observed chasing plovers, and none was ever reported actually catching or harming one. To supplement this minuscule number, the study points out that on another 15 occasions, plovers were also “inadvertently disturbed” by “roaming” dogs (p. 11). No data or other information on the nature or impact of these disturbances is offered, beyond the speculative assertion that plovers “appear more prone to taking flight, and consequently expending more energy, when approached by dogs than by people on foot” (p. 13). Nor are the effects of such disturbances known: As stated in the study, “[l]ittle research has been conducted on the energetic effects of disturbance, and on whether individuals can compensate for this lost energy intake and increased energy expenditure” (p. 13). Given that snowy plovers are reported traveling up to 1,140 km from breeding sites and up to 50 km between sites during winters on the California coast,⁶ the deleterious effects of occasionally walking, running, or even flying a short distance down the beach are hardly obvious.

⁵ The GGNRA apparently never thought to question whether the ban could actually have a negative impact on the plovers—although several factors were brought to their attention to suggest that it might. The presence of dogs may, for instance, serve to keep other predators at bay. As U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service experts explained at the “informational meeting,” the red fox has had a serious impact on plover populations south of San Francisco, but has apparently not been a presence on Ocean Beach. Furthermore, GGNRA’s own study showed that at least some dogs chased gulls, which are also known predators of plover chicks. Dog walkers further testified to daily efforts at cleaning trash off the beach—trash which attracts predators, including crows, ravens, foxes, and more gulls. These and other factors have been ignored, in spite of the compelling evidence that the coexistence of dogs and plovers has been a harmonious and possibly beneficial one for the plovers.

⁶ Page, G.W., Warriner, J.S. and J.C. & Paton, P.W.C. Snowy Plover. The Birds of North America. 1995. 154. 14, 15.

IV. Human Activities on Ocean Beach Shown to Harm Plovers

While the GGNRA found only positive correlations between the number of dogs and plovers, several other factors appear to have dramatically reduced plover numbers. These included the presence of All-Terrain-Vehicles, Peregrine falcons, and, on one survey date, 2,000 people on the beach (pp. 6,7); narrowed beach width due to storms, which was "suspected to be one of the most significant factors influencing Snowy Plover habitat suitability and availability on Ocean Beach" (p. 7); and a sand excavation project by the City of San Francisco that created a "significant" disturbance in the preferred roosting area between Noriega and Santiago Streets (pp. 6, 7). Indeed, that excavation moved 25,200 cubic yards of sand, displacing the entire wintering population of snowy plovers from its primary roosting area for over a month.⁷ Given that these factors corresponded to drops of 50 to 100 percent in the number of plovers on Ocean Beach (p. 7; Figure 4), GGNRA's concern over off-leash dogs seems misplaced, at best.

The GGNRA study also indicates that human activities disturbed plovers at least as often as off-leash dogs. GGNRA observers devoted about half as much time to studying human-caused disturbances, but they found slightly more than half as many plovers were disturbed (p. 12). These numbers include disturbances caused by joggers, surfers, walkers, helicopters, bulldozers, bicycles, and kite flyers (p.12). They do not include disturbances caused by the sand excavation project mentioned above or the Cape Mohican oil spill in October of last year. And the study fails to mention other recreational and governmental users witnessed on Ocean Beach, such as horseback riders and squadrons of San Francisco motorcycle police conducting training exercises. Nor does it attempt to analyze the different impacts on the plovers of, for instance, a bulldozer excavating sand from roosting areas compared to a dog inadvertently roaming nearby. "[B]ecause of the complex data analysis requirements," the study explains, this information is not expected to be available for another year (p. 4).

V. Government Actions Reveal Bias and Lack of Coherent Plan

Why the GGNRA rushed to ban off-leash dogs before compiling and analyzing its data is not clear. Its preoccupation with off-leash dogs, however, is evident and pervasive. For instance, on November 20, 1996, just four days after issuing its study, the GGNRA also released a brief, two-page report on

⁷ Post-operation compliance report submitted in reference to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1-1-96-F-11, formal section 7 consultation regarding Ocean Beach sand excavation. Correspondence to Joel A. Medlin, USFWS, from Daphne Hatch, GGNRA.

the effects of the Cape Mohican oil spill on the Ocean Beach plovers.⁸ One eighth of that report is devoted to a discussion of dogs--in particular, a single golden retriever who, according to the report, "did not specifically chase any Snowy Plovers, although they were disturbed by its presence." The Cape Mohican oil spill, by way of contrast, was an event that resulted in 10 plovers being oiled--fully one third of the population on Ocean Beach at the time--with potentially tragic results: As the report states, "[i]t is not known whether, or for how long, oiled shorebirds will survive. It is also very difficult to determine the extent of mortality due to oil contamination because dead shorebirds are very rarely found." Given the impact of this oil spill on the Ocean Beach plover population, the antics of one golden retriever, who, notably, did not chase a plover, would hardly seem to merit a footnote, much less a quarter page.

The lack of a balanced perspective or coherent plan is evident throughout the government's response to snowy plover protection, with alarming implications for the future of these rare birds. According to the USFWS, the loss and disturbance of nesting sites are responsible for the threatened status of the coastal population of the western snowy plover.⁹ It appears, however, that these plovers will lose even more breeding habitat in the future: As noted by the USFWS, artificial salt ponds in the San Francisco Bay now support the largest subpopulation of snowy plovers within its range. But this habitat has been targeted by that same agency for restoration to a historic tidal marsh as a part of the survival and recovery plans for two other species--the California clapper rail and the salt marsh harvest mouse, which are both listed as endangered.¹⁰ Since snowy plovers cannot nest in marshland, the loss of these salt pond breeding habitats would appear to be highly significant to recovery efforts. Yet, when the GGNRA was asked at its "informational meeting" about the option of constructing a fence to protect the Ocean Beach plovers--a solution that could provide protection from off-road vehicles, bulldozers, joggers, horseback riders, etc., and still allow off-leash dog walking to continue in non-fenced areas--its response was astonishing: According to the GGNRA's wildlife specialist and the author of its study, this option was rejected because it might encourage Snowy Plovers to breed on Ocean Beach and thereby result in more of these rare birds frequenting our shores!

⁸ Hatch, Daphne A. Initial Effects of the Cape Mohican Oil Spill on Western Snowy Plovers on Ocean Beach. November 20, 1996. GGNRA, National Park Service.

⁹ *Op Cit.*, 60 Fed. Reg. at p. 11768

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, at p. 11772

VI. Conclusion

We confess we are at a loss to understand the federal government's actions as a rational response to the plight of the western snowy plover. Nor, indeed, could it have been. The GGNRA decided to ban off-leash dogs before it had even collected and analyzed its data. It made this decision without any public notice, without any public explanation, and without any opportunity for public comment or participation. In an attempt to provide a post hoc justification, it rushed out its preliminary study a year before its data was fully analyzed and well in advance of any coherent general management plan for snowy plover recovery. Having found only positive correlations between the number of dogs and plovers on Ocean Beach, the GGNRA now rests its case against canines on the observation that one third of one percent, plus an even smaller number of "inadvertent" dogs, caused a plover to walk, run, or sometimes fly, out of reach. It does not know whether such disturbances have any harmful effects on the plovers. It has acknowledged, however, that its off-leash ban will have no effect on the number of plovers on Ocean Beach. And, with this admission, it has denied the public any means of evaluating its actions and has placed itself beyond all constraints of public accountability.

If the federal government truly believes the snowy plover is in need of protection, then we believe the GGNRA should complete a study of all the factors that affect plovers, open the process to public review and comment, and develop a coherent and effective plan to help these rare and wonderful birds. Nor would we object, if the GGNRA and USFWS consider the plover population to be in imminent danger, to the government's imposing a ban on all recreational and other activities in the affected areas of Ocean Beach, until a general management plan can be developed. **As it now stands, however, the ban on off-leash dogs appears to be nothing more than an arbitrary and capricious exercise of power by a bureaucracy that has used the plight of the snowy plover as a pretext for taking hostile measures against dogs and ousting responsible pet owners from public lands.**



March 31, 1995

Mr. Brian O'Neill
Superintendent
Fort Mason, Building 201
Golden Gate National Recreation Area
San Francisco, California 94123

Dear Mr. O'Neill:

In the past few months we have had several meetings with National Park Service officials concerning the future of off-leash dog walking in the Presidio and other areas of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area ("GGNRA"), including Crissy Field, Fort Funston, and Ocean Beach. At each of these meetings, we have been assured the National Park Service has no intention of limiting the areas that have been used for off-leash dog walking for decades.

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In spite of these assurances, we are now being told there are plans to significantly reduce GGNRA off-leash areas. Last Monday, for instance, we toured Ocean Beach with District Ranger Jim Milestone, who informed us that over half the Ocean Beach area would soon be off-limits to off-leash dogs--a step considered necessary to protect the snowy plover who visits some areas of this beach. This information came less than two weeks after it was announced to 250 Fort Funston dog walkers that nearly 45 acres of this popular off-leash area would be closed to both dogs and people--both to control erosion and to create native plant habitats. And both these announcements come on the heels of the dramatic changes proposed for Crissy Field, including the proposal to set aside a major portion of this traditional dog run area for the creation of a new man-made wetland.

In defense of these restrictions, Park officials have pointed to the mission of the National Park Service. This mission, as they've explained to us, is first and foremost to preserve and expand native habitats. And we are told National Park Service staff share a strong personal, as well as professional, commitment to these goals. No doubt this commitment is to be applauded, and it may indeed be precisely what is needed to protect our nation's wilderness areas.

The Golden Gate National Recreation Area is not, however, a wilderness area. As evidenced by its name, it is a *recreation* center, surrounded by a heavily populated urban environment. And it is the GGNRA's recreational value that was of the utmost importance to the Congress that established this great urban park. In their words, the GGNRA was to be a "new national urban recreation area which will concentrate on serving the outdoor recreation needs of the people of the metropolitan region," and its objective was "to expand to the maximum extent possible the outdoor recreation opportunities available in this region." H. R. Rep. No. 1391, 92nd Cong., 2nd Session (1972).

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Over the last 20 years, it seems to us that the intent of Congress in creating the GGNRA has by and large been honored. Wildlife and recreation--the dogs and birds, joggers and raccoons, bicycles and squirrels--have coexisted relatively peacefully. Only since the arrival of literally hundreds of new National Park Service staff has anyone thought there was a conflict. And now that the conflicts are multiplying--at Fort Funston, Ocean Beach, and Crissy Field--we are becoming increasingly concerned about how the Park Service plans to resolve them.

What happens, for instance, when the wetland proposed for Crissy Field attracts new and existing wildlife species in greater numbers, and these animals venture outside the wetland's boundaries? Will the Park Service fence off more and more of Crissy Field to protect the new residents from off-leash dog walkers, joggers, bicyclists, frisbee players, picnickers, and thousands of others who use this area today? If the native habitat projects at Fort Funston succeed and native plants begin to flourish and support new wildlife populations, will the fences be moved further and further, taking more and more space away from traditional recreational uses? And if the snowy plover, who now rests on some of the soon-to-be restricted portion of Ocean Beach, flies further down the shore, will the entire beach be put off-limits? If what we have seen and heard so far is a picture of what is to come, we fear that major portions of the GGNRA may well turn into fenced compounds--off limits to all but the National Park Service staff assigned to keep the rest of us out.

Mr. O'Neill, we believe the question of whether the GGNRA is to be a wildlife habitat, a recreation area, or a combination of both needs to be answered before site-specific plans and policies are adopted for each unique area of the GGNRA. But we don't believe this question should be answered by National Park Service staff alone. Rather, we ask that it be put to the public--to the hundreds of thousands of people who care deeply about the future of these spectacular lands. We ask that public hearings be held before the Golden Gate National Recreation Area Advisory Commission, or other appropriate body, to specifically address this question. We also ask that there be adequate notice and a meaningful opportunity for the public to comment and be heard. And, finally, we ask that the National Park Service listen to those who testify, and that it work to create a GGNRA that balances habitat preservation and recreation area enhancement.

Sincerely,

RICHARD AVANZINO
President

cc: Golden Gate National Recreation Area Advisory Commission
Mr. Robert Chandler, Presidio Project Manager
Golden Gate National Recreation Area
Mr. James Milestone, South District Ranger
Golden Gate National Recreation Area

The Value of Dogs to Society

Off-leash dog walking areas are a vital component of responsible pet ownership. San Francisco's Ocean Beach is among the few remaining places in our densely populated urban environment where dogs can socialize freely and run off the energy they've built up from having been confined in houses and apartments. Tens of thousands of dog owners throughout the San Francisco Bay Area depend on Ocean Beach to provide for the health and well-being of their pets. In return, dogs enrich—even protect—our lives.

For single people, dogs offer a welcome relief from loneliness. Dogs also provide a sense of safety and security, allowing many people freedom they wouldn't otherwise have. For children, an animal in the home contributes warmth and unconditional love, and teaches responsibility and consideration for the needs of another creature. For some, a dog provides the incentive to get up in the morning—a walk on the beach with their best friend may be the highlight of their day or week. For others, it is often the only daily exercise they get. And in an increasingly sedentary society, these benefits can enhance health and prolong life.

Dogs provide people with myriad emotional, physical, and social benefits. Many studies, starting with the landmark research that found that petting an animal can lower a patient's blood pressure, have confirmed the physiological advantages of companion animals. Another study found that owning a dog is a better stress-reducer than being visited by a good friend. Yet another demonstrated that elderly individuals who shared their lives with dogs were less stressed, and needed fewer visits to the doctor than non-pet owners.

And these benefits extend beyond the immediate: Every person whose blood pressure is lowered by petting a dog represents a heart attack that didn't happen. Every child who learns kindness and gentleness and responsibility for others from caring for a pet is a good citizen in the making.

Dogs also contribute to a more positive environment in our City by facilitating contact and communication between people. Studies have found that the presence of a dog increases the likelihood of friendly contact between people. This is especially true—and important—for people with mobility problems or other special needs that keep them socially isolated.

Dogs do so much good for society: they give us a sense of optimism, safeguard us from depression and loneliness, and break down the barriers that isolate us from one another. Their presence improves our health, protects us from danger, and teaches us about caring and responsibility. And they ask for so little in return. Off-leash recreation at Ocean Beach is an essential part of how many people care for their pets. But it is more than that. It is a way to give a little something back to the animals who give us all so much. Taking away such an indispensable part of responsible pet care will have a profound impact not only on tens of thousands of people and animals, but on society itself.

Ocean Beach Off-Leash Dog Ban What You Can Do

The San Francisco SPCA feels strongly that the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) should conduct an objective study of all the factors affecting the safety of snowy plovers at Ocean Beach; provide a detailed analysis of each, along with a complete list of potential corrective actions; and submit a plan for protecting the birds for public review and comment. After taking the public's views into consideration, the GGNRA should then respond with a final plan explaining which corrective actions they chose, and why.

We also believe that until this process is complete, either the ban should be lifted, or if the snowy plovers are in imminent danger, all recreational and other activities in the affected areas of Ocean Beach should be banned.

If you agree, please write to the following officials:

The Honorable Tom Lantos
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Barbara Boxer
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

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