

More money needed before beach problems are solved

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A letter-writing campaign and some old-fashioned elbow grease may be the only realistic approaches to some of the complaints homeowners have about how the state parks department maintains and patrols beaches in the Rio del Mar and Seacliff areas.

Representatives from the Rio del Mar, Seacliff and Seascape

improvement associations met Wednesday with Assemblyman Sam Farr, D-Carmel, and state parks officials in Farr's Santa Cruz office.

Parks officials told the group that some of the problems, such as an inadequate number of trash cans and long-delayed cleanup of winter-storm debris, had already been taken care of, but that others — personnel shortages and ancient equipment, for instance — could only be addressed with money, which is in very short supply.

Farr suggested writing to Gov. George Deukmejian, who has the final say on budget allocations, to tell him of the need for more rangers and newer equipment.

"The squeaky wheel gets the grease," he told the 10 people clustered around the conference table. "so let's squeak a little."

Currently, two rangers are usually on duty at any one time to patrol the 28 miles of state beaches in Santa Cruz County. Beach-cleaning equipment is 16 years old and breaks down constantly, Jack Kirchner, the maintenance supervisor, said.

Donald S. Griffin, president of the Seacliff group, asked Kirchner about a landslide that has blocked the east beach trail near the park on East Seacliff Drive.

"Can we get some people down there and fix that thing?" he asked, when Kirchner said that he simply did not have the manpower for it.

"I'd be willing to get materials down there and a plan on how to take care of it," Kirchner replied.

Griffin said yesterday he was planning to "get on the phone" and organize a community project to repair the slide.

"I stuck my neck out and we're going to do it," he said. "I may be the only one out there."

Griffin also said that in his next newsletter he would ask his association's members to write to the governor.

Overall, he said, the meeting was positive.

"I thought it went very well," he said. "Sam was very constructive and the fellows from the parks department indicated their problems. Their problems are financial. There's probably a much better understanding of the problems they have."

Other issues discussed at the meeting included dogs running loose on the beach and the lack of fire rings for campfires.

Jim Hart, the chief ranger for the area, explained that his staff gives citations to dog owners when they can, but that the real problems are caused by dogs whose owners are nowhere to be found. And, he said, with only two rangers, catching stray dogs tended to have low priority.

Farr suggested doing some selective enforcement; that is, announcing that the rangers would be picking up dogs in a certain area and trying to get some publicity.

On the subject of illegal fires, Kirchner explained that he was having trouble getting enough fire rings to replace old ones that had fallen apart.

Ron McCall, deputy director at the parks department's Monterey office, said there was also a need for lifeguards in the area. Farr asked for a report on the cost of a lifeguard program.

But the real problem on the beaches, Farr said, is lack of money, and the governor needs to be persuaded that Santa Cruz County needs more.

"You could argue that the beaches are your greatest economic asset," he said. "Santa Cruz County, being a small county in population, doesn't get the same treatment that a large county does. But on weekends, you get all the people from over the hill and have the population of a big county."