

Seacliff plan gives neighbors indigestion

State studying restaurant on bluff above Cement Ship

By ERIN K. QUIRK
Sentinel staff writer

SEACLIFF — Right now you can walk your dog there, or fly a kite, or watch an occasional fireworks show. But if the state Department of Parks and Recreation has its way with the 7-acre field next to Seacliff State Park, you might be dining there instead.

The department is investigating the feasibility of a 2000-square-foot, 100-seat restaurant on the empty bluff just above the Cement Ship. District Superintendent George Cook said the project is still in its fledgling stages and would require a General Plan amendment, many public hearings and a willing res-

taurateur.

But neighbors are already fighting the development of an area that they have for years used as open space.

"My major concern is that they are taking a piece of open space and they are going to build something on it," said Victor Ogrey, president of the Seacliff Park Improvement Association. "For an organization whose motto is 'Preserving the best of California Forever,' I see a conflict."

For the last several years, the parks department has studied several options for increasing revenues. The proposal to develop an RV Park next to Wilder Ranch was said at the time to be a prototype for public/private ventures, meant to ease the pinch of years of drastic funding cuts.

"We need to come up with some money," Cook said. "There are lots of different ways to do that, and we can't raise fees forever."

Cook said the parks department has allowed concessions on several properties already, such as the tent cabins and the store at Big Basin. He said each

concession is independently operated, with the parks department taking a percentage of revenues. The restaurant plan at Seacliff would be similar but would operate on a larger scale.

"In places where it makes sense for us to do things, we need to be doing them," Cook said. "This makes eminent sense from our point of view."

Cook said the bluff above the Cement Ship offers a magnificent view of the bay and involves no significant environmental concerns. A feasibility study prepared by a marketing professor at Sacramento State University recommends the site based on population projections, discretionary income trends and county employment characteristics. In fact, the study predicts that revenues for the proposed restaurant would total approximately \$618,000 in the first year and \$1.2 million a year by 2015.

But Ogrey and neighbor Dave Boggi, who both live across the street from the land, have disputed those figures and have started canvassing the local

restaurant community to see if they add up. Ogrey said the restaurant's total revenue means nothing to the parks department because, under the plan, it will take 6.1 percent of the profits. Ogrey wonders how the parks system will keep tabs on the restaurant profits.

"State Parks is simply not sophisticated enough to enter into the restaurant business," Ogrey said. "Their business is running parks — that's what they do."

But Cook said the neighbors will find problems with any proposal for that land.

"I think it's a NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) issue really," Cook said. "Whatever we do out there we know they'll raise questions."

Ogrey said he does have great concerns about traffic flow in his neighborhood, noise from delivery trucks and the possibility of a vacant restaurant building on what was open space.

Cook said the study is currently making its way through the parks department echelons and he doesn't expect much activity with it until next year.