

## Scientists want species protected at Pacifica golf course

By Elizabeth Pfeffer  
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PACIFICA — A group of nine scientists with specialties in coastal ecosystems have sent a public letter to the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department supporting a restoration plan for Sharp Park that would revitalize declining populations of two native species living in the wetlands along the fairways of its golf course.

The letter describes the precarious situation of the endangered San Francisco garter snake, and threatened California red-legged frog, which is protected under the Endangered Species Act. The scientists say that mowing the greens and the pumping of nearby Horse Stable Pond are killing both species.

The Center for Biological Diversity urged the panel of biologists, ecologists and hydrologists to assess restoration needs at Sharp Park Golf Course in light of the city's own attempt at pulling together alternative plans for the space. The golf course is in Pacifica but it is owned and operated by San Francisco.

According to Coastal Plant Ecologist Peter Baye, the scientists were not paid to write the letter, nor are they affiliated with the environmental group.

Baye left the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in 2002 to become an independent contractor. His expertise

is in coastal wetlands and restoration of dunes and lagoons.

The area of Sharp Park reserved for the red-legged frogs and garter snakes is so limited that in the event of bad storms — which are on the rise — the species would be pushed to the most seaward area where they would have little chance of survival, Baye said.

“Right now the golf course has pushed everything in harm's way,” he said. “All endangered species are crammed into areas of over wash if there's a catastrophic storm.”

Additionally, the letter warns that rising sea levels are imminent and Sharp Park Golf Course, as is, will not stand the test of major flooding.

The San Francisco Recreation and Park Department report due Aug. 31 will present three possibilities that include doing away with the golf course, reducing it to nine holes, or leaving it as is while attempting to protect the snakes and frogs. It was originally supposed to be completed by July 31.

That report, however, may still not come in on time, according to San Francisco Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi, who authored the ordinance calling for the restoration plans and protection of the species. He said on Wednesday that because of leadership changes in the park department and the complexity of the issue, it could require more time to take a measured approach and evaluate all angles.

Last year, the Center for Biological Diversity pressured San Francisco to call for a plan to comply with the Endangered Species Act. Since then, environmentalists and golfers who want to see the course remain untouched have been at odds.

One of San Francisco's options is to enter into a joint management agreement with the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, which could potentially assist in protecting the snakes and frogs. Golfers, however, fear it would take away their sporting venue.

The city is attempting to meet the needs of everyone invested in the park while protecting the frogs and snakes, Mirkarimi said. He added that while Pacifica, golfers and animal lovers have been vying to be heard, San Francisco has to foot the bill.

Pacifica recently filed to grant the fairways historic landmark status, which could hamper restoration plans. San Francisco officials say they were not given notice.

“It belies their request to constantly be included in our processes as well,” Mirkarimi said. “It's a contradiction, to say the least.”

Pacifica Planning Director Michael Crabtree said the issue had been continued to the Sept. 8 Planning Commission meeting where San Francisco would have a chance to weigh in.