

SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC GOLF ALLIANCE



The San Francisco Park, Recreation, and Open Space Advisory Committee (“PROSAC”) at the conclusion of a December 1 public hearing overwhelmingly endorsed retaining the 18-hole Alister MacKenzie-designed Sharp Park Golf Course.

By a 14-1 vote, PROSAC endorsed preservation of the golf course, in conjunction with a Rec & Park Department plan to rehabilitate habitat at the western end of the property for two threatened species, the S.F. Garter Snake and the California Red-legged Frog. By a separate 13-2 vote, PROSAC approved a resolution encouraging the Rec & Park Department to continue efforts to cooperate at Sharp Park with the City of Pacifica and County of San Mateo. On a preliminary procedural vote, PROSAC members declined to include the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (“GGNRA”) in the “cooperation” resolution. All of PROSAC’s recommendations will be forwarded to the Rec & Park Commission, which will conduct a continued public hearing on the Sharp Park matter.

At six monthly meetings since July ‘09 PROSAC has heard a series of reports and public testimony about various aspects of the golf, financial, and environmental restoration issues at Sharp Park.

Prior to PROSAC’s December 1 votes, Committee members also heard public testimony from David Monroe and Karen Swaim, the lead scientists and principal authors of the Sharp Park Conceptual Alternatives Report. Monroe (from Tetra-Tech, an environmental consulting firm) said that retaining the 18-hole golf course, with some modifications in the area of two large ponds at the SW corner of the property near the sea wall, conferred substantial habitat enhancement benefits for the frog and snake, at significantly lower cost than eliminating the golf course or reducing it to 9 holes. The projected high expense of the no-golf and 9-hole alternatives, Monroe explained, reflect extensive earthmoving costs necessary to excavate and remove the non-native and highly invasive kikuyu grass from the golf fairways.

Dr. Swaim, the city’s frog & snake expert, identified herself as also the principal snake consultant for the GGNRA’s ongoing S.F. Garter Snake-restoration project at Mori Point, which adjoins the Sharp Park GC immediately to the south. Habitat at the Golf Course’s Laguna Salada and Horse Stable ponds, she said, will be significantly restored under the city’s Sharp Park Plan, which will also improve “connectivity” for the

snakes to move back and forth between the ponds and the Mori Point habitat restoration areas.

Dr. Swaim strongly dis-recommended an alternative plan—which has been advocated by the “Restore Sharp Park” project of the Tucson-based Center for Biological Diversity—to construct new frog ponds and snake habitat east of Laguna Salada toward Highway 1. New habitat in that area, she explained, would constitute an “attractive nuisance” for the species, drawing colonization away from Mori Point, and creating an unsustainable habitat that would be marooned between the freeway and the adjoining residential neighborhoods in the event of long-term sea level rise, which would cut-off the area near Highway 1 from Mori Point.

At the Rec & Park Commission’s public hearing (Nov. 19), Dr. Swaim opined that in the event of closure of the golf course, there would be increased predation on the frog and snake by cats, raccoons, skunks, and rats, which would be neither discouraged by golf operations nor controlled by “alpha predators” such as coyotes, because Highway One cuts the property off from the open hills.

Following presentations from Swaim, Monroe, and Rec & Park Planning Director Dawn Kamalanathan, the PROSAC committee members heard testimony from 10 citizens, all of whom testified in favor of retaining the 18-hole golf course.

The Dec. 1 meeting was first PROSAC meeting since July ‘09 at which no representative of the Center for Biological Diversity appeared to argue for closing the golf course. In Sept. ‘08, that organization served a Notice of Intent to Sue letter on the City of S.F, citing alleged “take” and threatened “take” of endangered species at the golf course. No suit has been filed to date.

The Nov. 6, 2009 Sharp Park Report is the third outside study commissioned by Rec & Park since Feb. ‘07 to conclude that the Sharp Park GC should not be closed.

With its Dec. 1 resolution, PROSAC joins Congresswoman Jackie Speier, San Mateo County Board of Supervisors, and the Pacifica City Council, in calling for the preservation of the 18-hole Sharp Park GC, consistent with habitat restoration for the threatened species. In a Nov. press release, Congresswoman Speier promised to lead a multi-county, multi-agency effort to “help identify the revenues necessary to complete this very worthwhile project.”

This article was supplied courtesy of Richard Harris, Esq., and co-founder of the San Francisco Public Golf Alliance.