

State Parks denies county vehicle request

May 1, 2020



An effort by Del Norte County Supervisors to get at least part of the county reopened has failed.

County Administrative Officer Jay Sarina told supervisors Tuesday, April 28, at their regular meeting that State Parks denied a request to allow residents vehicular access to local units.

Sarina explained motorists can drive into Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park via Walker Road, which the supervisors voted to reopen last week, but the parking area will remain cordoned off.

District 3 Supervisor Chris Howard originally brought up at a prior meeting State Parks' decision to install lockable gates at some access points in local state park units without seeking public comment. Not pleased with State Parks' rejection, Howard directed county staff to send a letter to Gov. Gavin Newsom asking for an exemption for Del Norte County from a soft closure throughout the State Parks system that prohibits people from parking at its units.

Howard pointed to another contributor to the county's exasperation - a statement on State Parks' department web page regarding its response to COVID-19, that it would work with county representatives and their

public health officers, had been removed.

“I don’t know where to go from here,” Howard said. “But there’s a lot of frustrated people in this community specific to the gate issue that is now in the state clearinghouse.”

Howard added he has also reached out to a representative from State Sen. Mike McGuire’s office.

“Continuing to have state park units closed to residents encourages people to congregate at areas that aren’t parking spaces,” Howard said.

Brett Silver, State Parks’ supervising ranger for the Redwoods Coast sector, had advised Sarina at the April 21 supervisors meeting to make the county’s request for an exemption to the soft closure order via California Office of Emergency Services.

Sarina told supervisors Tuesday he received an email back from the county’s representative to the California Office of Emergency Services’ regional center.

“It’s my understanding once it got to the regional center, State Parks said no they were not interested in doing that,” Sarina said. “It went back down the chain and back to me through our representative and that was the answer. I’m not sure why we had to go through that step, but I didn’t get a lot of detail in talking with Brett.”

The locked gates issue was originally brought to Howard’s attention earlier this month by Mike Coopman, a local fishing guide and representative of the Nor-Cal Guides & Sportsmen’s Association. On Tuesday, Coopman told supervisors that he was worried the gates were installed without input from the public or from local elected officials.

“My hopes are that this COVID-19 stuff will pass. Yet if the state and national park are allowed to put in permanent gates, those are permanent and going in under the cloak of COVID-19 and completely in the dark to all elected officials, including the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors, the sheriff, Congressman Huffman, Sen. McGuire, all of the above,” Coopman said. “It seems rather secretive and, in our opinion, an overreach.”

Coopman added that the Nor-Cal Guides & Sportsmen’s Association has also sent letters to the region’s state representatives opposing the gates.