

A Report of the 2002-2003 Civil Grand Jury  
For the City and County of San Francisco

**SHARING CAMP MATHER, SAN FRANCISCO'S  
SECRET JEWEL, WITH ALL SAN FRANCISCANS**

Released June 11, 2003

Reports of the Civil Grand Jury do not identify the individuals interviewed, pursuant to California Penal Code sec. 929. The California Legislature intended this provision to encourage full candor and cooperation by City and County personnel.

Parties identified in this report must respond to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court within the number of days specified, with a copy sent to the Board of Supervisors. As to each finding of the Grand Jury, the response must either (1) agree with the finding, or (2) disagree with it, wholly or partially, and explain why. Further, as to each recommendation made by the Grand Jury, the responding party must report either (1) that the recommendation has been implemented, with a summary explanation of how it was implemented; (2) the recommendation has not been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation; (3) the recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation of the scope of that analysis and a timeframe for the officer or agency head to be prepared to discuss it (not exceeding six months from the release of this Report); or (4) the recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or reasonable, with an explanation of why that is. (Cal. Penal Code, secs. 933, 933.05.)

# SHARING CAMP MATHER, SAN FRANCISCO'S SECRET JEWEL, WITH ALL SAN FRANCISCANS

## Summary of Recommendations

1. Improve publicity and accessibility to Camp Mather.
2. Study and improve the usage of the Camp Mather facilities and grounds.

## OVERVIEW

Camp Mather is a family camp located in Tuolumne County near the north entrance to Yosemite National Park. Located approximately 180 miles east of San Francisco at an elevation of 4,520 feet, Camp Mather is operated for San Francisco residents and their families by the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department (RPD). It has 90 rustic cabins and 20 tent sites, each able to accommodate up to six people, on approximately 400 acres. Full board, a camp store, and several recreational programs are provided for the campers. During a 12-week camping season, two weeks of which are reserved for seniors, approximately 6,000 persons, in 1,100 families, take advantage of the Camp Mather facilities. The camp can accommodate 529 people at each session. The number of applications for cabins and tent sites exceeds the available spaces.

The privately run Strawberry Music Festival, draws another 10,000 people in total to Camp Mather on the Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends.

Camp Mather is financially self-sufficient and, in past years, has contributed in excess of \$300,000 annually to the RPD general fund. Camping fees and revenue from SMF and other concessions exceed the expense of operating Camp Mather. In a time of budget crisis, Camp Mather could produce additional revenue.

Camp Mather was described several years ago in the press as “the city’s most carefully kept secret,” one that most San Franciscans don’t know exists. The location, lack of publicity, a complex application process, and failure to provide information about Camp Mather in languages other than English limit access to Camp Mather for many San Francisco residents. The Grand Jury defines “accessibility” as awareness of Camp Mather and its availability to residents, an application form that is easily read and completed, an equitable selection process, and availability of adequate transportation to the Camp for people who want to use it.

The ratio of returning campers to first-time campers suggests that RPD publicity and outreach for Camp Mather is not adequate to make the availability of the facility known to a wide spectrum of San Franciscans. The Grand Jury recommends that efforts be made to inform all segments of San Francisco’s multiethnic population that Camp Mather is available to them, that “campership” opportunities (partially subsidized fees) for low income residents be expanded, and that RPD study ways in which more San Francisco residents might have the opportunity to enjoy Camp Mather’s facilities.

## **BACKGROUND**

Bearing the name of Stephen T. Mather, the first director of the National Park Service, Camp Mather has been used as a municipal camp for almost 80 years. In 1921, San Francisco constructed a timber mill and railway station at Camp Mather for use in the construction of the O'Shaughnessy Dam at Hetch Hetchy. In 1923, with the assistance of M.M. O'Shaughnessy, the city's chief engineer, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors selected a site on land known as the Hog Ranch, which had been acquired in conjunction with the Hetch Hetchy Water Supply project, for the establishment of a municipal camp, the "San Francisco Mountain Recreation Camp and Playground." Management and control of what is now Camp Mather was placed with the then Playground Commission. The first Mountain Camp on this site, near Mather Station and south of then existing Hetch Hetchy Railroad, was inaugurated on July 5, 1924, in former Hetch Hetchy buildings. In 1921, the Yosemite National Park Company had leased land at Mather north of the railroad for an 18-year term. Between 1921 and 1925 the company built and operated a camp on that site. The lease was terminated and the Playground Commission bought the lodge (now the dining hall), cabins, and other equipment from the lessee for \$15,500.

Today, Camp Mather offers a variety of recreational opportunities. Swimming in a lake or pool, fly-fishing, horseback riding, evening dances, campfire songs, skits and games are all available. There are also facilities for tennis, badminton, ping-pong, horseshoes, volleyball and softball. Three meals a day, served cafeteria style, are available in the dining hall. Programs are offered for young children, including an arts and crafts program. There is a children's play area with play apparatus.

Members of the Grand Jury visited Camp Mather and inspected the site. They interviewed members of the RPD staff. They reviewed relevant provisions of the San Francisco Administrative and Park Codes, the Camp Mather application form, and informational material about Camp Mather published by RPD.

## **FACTS, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **1. MAKE CAMP MATHER MORE ACCESSIBLE**

#### **FACTS**

- In 2003, RPD simplified what had been a complex, three-page Camp Mather application form, reducing it to a one-page, more easily understood form. It also began providing persons who request an application with an explanation of the lottery process by which reservations are awarded. This notice also informs applicants of a campership program for lower income families and of job opportunities at Camp Mather.

- RPD is a Tier 2 department subject to San Francisco Administrative Code, chapter 91 (the Equal Access to Services Ordinance), section 91.4, (Translation of Materials). Section 91.4, subdivision (b), mandates: “Tier 2 Departments shall translate all publicly-posted documents that provide information (1) regarding Department services or programs, or (2) affecting a person’s right to, determination of eligibility of, award of, denial of, loss of, or decreases in benefits or services into the language(s) spoken by a Substantial Number of Limited English Speaking Persons.” Subdivision (c) of Section 91.4 provides: “Departments required to translate materials under the provisions of the Section shall post notices in the public areas of their facilities in the relevant languages(s) indicating that written materials in the languages(s) and staff who speak the language(s) are available. The notices shall be posted prominently and shall be readily visible to the public.” A “substantial Number of Limited English Speaking Persons” means “either 10,000 City residents, or 5 percent of those persons who use the Department’s services.” (Sec. 91.2, subd. (j).)
- Although the Equal Access to Services regulations required all departments subject to its provision to submit a compliance plan within 90 days of its enactment on June 15, 2001, RPD has not done so.
- RPD advertises Camp Mather by sending approximately 3,000 fliers to 270 RPD sites each year. It is also advertised in travel magazines that include campgrounds. Applications are usually distributed and posted at recreation centers. The fliers are in English only. No information about Camp Mather, other than its location in Tuolumne County and the RPD telephone numbers for the camp desk and senior program, is available on the RPD web site.
- The Camp Mather desk at the RPD office in McLaren Lodge is open from January to August. The RPD staff members assigned to the Camp Mather desk speak English only.<sup>1</sup>
- The Camp Mather application form, rules and regulations, and notice regarding the lottery, camperships, and employment are available in English only.
- Applications for camping reservations are sent automatically to persons who have applied during the past two years or who have requested an application by telephone or at the Camp Mather desk during the past two years.
- Although the Camp Mather application form warns that incomplete applications will be returned, it does not identify the items that must accompany an application, such as, a deposit check, proof of residence in San Francisco, and proof of the age of children who will accompany the applicant. That information is found only in the lengthy sheet of rules and regulations that accompanies an application.

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<sup>1</sup> Since 2002, questions about Camp Mather can be submitted through e-mail.

- Applications for reservations are accepted during a one-week period in late March and are awarded through a lottery. Resident and non-resident applications are divided into separate pools and numbered as they are received. The range of numbers is given to Management Information Systems which causes a computerized random number to be assigned to each number in that range. Those randomly selected numbers are used to determine the order in which reservations are awarded, with San Francisco residents given reservations first. A person who owns property in San Francisco, but lives outside the City, is considered a resident. After all reservations have been made, a waiting list is created based on the remaining lottery numbers. A reservation board is open for public inspection.
- In 2002, 1,194 San Francisco residents and 270 non-residents applied for Camp Mather reservations before the deadline. Of the 1,100 families who were awarded reservations, 814 (74%) were returning campers.
- Because the number of applicants exceeds the available spaces, RPD staff members are reluctant to give the camp any additional publicity.
- Disappointed applicants, who are not always aware of the demand for reservations and how the lottery system works, often express their anger to RPD staff.
- Camp fees for residents, exclusive of meals, currently range from \$303.00 to \$666.00 per week for cabins accommodating two to six persons. The weekly rates for resident tent sites are \$120.00 for a four-person tent and \$157.00 for a six-person tent. Non-resident fees are approximately 20% higher.
- The “campership” program available to lower income San Francisco residents offers a 50% fee discount for one qualified resident household during each week of the ten regular weeklong camping sessions. The applications must be made by the end of the first week in March. The reservations, awarded by lottery, are assigned before the regular application process begins. Approximately 20 campership applications are received each year. In some years, the ten available slots have not been filled. Transportation is not provided for these families.
- Senior session fees are \$185.00 per week including lodging, meals and transportation. Applications are processed in order of receipt, with San Francisco residents having priority.
- Camp Mather is located on Evergreen Road, seven miles from Highway 120 and approximately 30 miles from Groveland, the closest town. There is no public transportation to Camp Mather. RPD offers transportation by chartered bus for the two senior camping weeks. Greyhound Bus service is available to Sonora, approximately 60 miles away. The nearest Amtrak station (Turlock-Denier) is approximately 40 miles away.

## **FINDINGS**

1. RPD has failed to comply with the translation requirements of the Equal Access to Facilities regulations. As a result of this failure and the limited publicity about Camp Mather, RPD has not made information about the availability of Camp Mather available to a wide cross-section of San Francisco residents. English speaking residents who see the fliers at RPD sites may become aware of the facility, but many others who either have limited English or do not visit RPD sites and might be interested in Camp Mather are not being reached through RPD's current publicity.
2. Although the reservation lottery appears to be a fair and equitable means of selecting campers from those who apply, the proportion of applications from prior campers to applications from others suggests that in other respects the RPD procedures favor prior campers.
3. The low number of campership applications may reflect a failure of RPD to do outreach into low-income communities, and the difficulty in reaching Camp Mather without a private automobile.
4. The omission from the application form itself of notice that a check and proof of residence and age of children may result in rejection of applications that would otherwise be timely and complete.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1a. RPD should make the availability of Camp Mather and the campership program known to all San Francisco residents through an expanded outreach program. In addition to fliers, information about the facility and application procedure should be made available through community newspapers, the San Francisco Unified School District, and social service agencies in the City.
- 1b. The application form should be revised to specify in the box warning that incomplete applications will be rejected that a deposit check as well as proof of residence and children's ages must accompany the applications.
- 1c. All materials regarding Camp Mather, including instructions on completion of the application form, should be available in the languages required by the Equal Access to Services provisions of the San Francisco Administrative Code. Translation services should be made available for persons who inquire about Camp Mather by telephone or at the Camp Mather desk in McLaren Lodge.
- 1d. The limited number of spaces and the lottery system for awarding reservations should be explained in the information sheet that is given to prospective campers with the

applications. Fliers, applications, and voice mail messages at the Camp Mather desk should clearly state that there is more demand than space available at Camp Mather.

- 1e. If additional publicity and outreach results in more applications for camperships, the number should be increased.
- 1f. Transportation to Camp Mather should be made available to qualified campership applicants.

### **REQUIRED RESPONSES**

Recreation and Park Department – 60 days

Recreation and Park Commission – 60 days

Board of Supervisors – 90 days

## **2. MAKING THE BEST USE OF CAMP MATHER**

### **FACTS**

- Approximately 6,000 San Franciscans use Camp Mather during the 12 regular camping sessions.
- More than 200 applications had to be rejected in 2002 because all spaces were reserved.
- The camp also has been used by the RPD Assisted Recreation Division's Project Insight program, which offers overnight camping trips to deaf and blind children.
- Camp Mather produced revenue of \$1,490,000 in the 2001-2002 fiscal year. Campers paid fees totaling \$1,352,000. Revenue from concessions included \$16,000 from the general store and \$1,000 from Mather Saddle. Camping fees were last raised in 1998.
- The Strawberry Music Festival has used Camp Mather on the Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends for 20 years. RPD has extended its use through 2008. Strawberry Festival, Inc. paid RPD \$121,000 for use of Camp Mather in the 2001-2002 fiscal year. RPD staff members do not agree on whether use of Camp Mather by 5,000 persons over each weekend of this bluegrass festival has a negative environmental impact.
- RPD anticipates that Camp Mather operating expenses, including facilities maintenance, will total \$678,594 for the 2002-2003 fiscal year. The camp is projected to return revenue of \$1,275,000 in the 2002-2003 fiscal year.
- There might be other public and private organizations and individuals that would be interested in using Camp Mather facilities either before or after the summer camping sessions. RPD has not investigated this possibility.

### **FINDINGS**

1. RPD has not made the most optimal use of Camp Mather.
2. If the camping season can be extended and/or additional cabins and tent sites built, more San Francisco residents will be able to take advantage of its facilities.
3. Increased fees could cover the cost of building more cabins and tent sites, increasing the number of camperships, and providing transportation to families who are otherwise unable to utilize Camp Mather.
4. Increased revenue generated by Camp Mather could contribute significantly to the support of other, non-revenue generating, RPD programs.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

2. RPD, engaging a consultant if necessary, should investigate means by which more San Franciscans can make use of Camp Mather and the camp can generate more revenue. To that end, the investigation should consider raising fees, adding more cabins and tent sites, and extending the camp season. The investigation should also consider rental of the camp to additional private parties. The study should consider both the impact of increased use of Camp Mather the for campers and the impact of use of the campgrounds for activities that draw large crowds.

### **REQUIRED RESPONSES**

Recreation and Park Department - 60 days

Recreation and Park Commission – 60 days

Board of Supervisors – 90 days

**The Members of the 2002-2003 Civil Grand Jury  
For the City and County of San Francisco**

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