

# Farewell to Beach Bonfires?

December 20, 2003

Dear Reclaiming friends,

As some of you know, the Golden Gate National Recreational Area (GGNRA) management is considering **limiting or banning bonfires at Ocean Beach.**

Five of us from the Bay Area ritual planning cells (Kala, Denise, George, Jim, and Thistle) have attended public hearings this year. We spoke out against any limit on beach bonfires, emphasizing civil liberties and our connection to the Earth and to this particular stretch of beach.

At the last hearing (November), it seemed likely that the GGNRA will limit beach bonfires to the area across from Golden Gate Park (Fulton to Lincoln only).

The Ranger who was moderating the hearing, George Degarian, assured us that Reclaiming and other spiritual groups would be allowed to continue our Solstice rituals near Taraval Street.

But aside from this loose personal guarantee (which may not reflect official policy), **our semi-annual Solstice celebrations may soon be illegal.**

Sound like hyperbole? If civil liberties were flourishing across the length and breadth of America, if Green and Socialist candidates were winning offices and judgeships, I'd admit I might be over-reacting.

But I think this "administrative" elimination of a major public gathering space — the only space in all of San Francisco where people *can* safely build a bonfire! — is symptomatic of a huge, ongoing attack on our rights.

And it is a perfect issue to take a stand against the use of "budget crises" to take away public rights and services.

## Limiting Bonfires?

The ostensible reasons for limiting bonfires are (A) the nuisance to nearby neighbors, and (B) hazardous debris and garbage left behind.

As to (A), at the two meetings I attended, local neighbors were evenly split for and against limits. Several Sunset neighbors spoke forcefully against any limits or even permits for bonfires.

As to (B), no educational campaign has yet been attempted. No signs, no leaflets, nothing. I and others pleaded with the GGNRA to try education before limiting civil rights. They nodded and took notes.

So — did you see any signs about fire-safety on your way to the ritual tonight?

It seems clear to me that the primary motive behind limiting beach bonfires is to reduce maintenance and ranger-patrol budgets.

I sympathize with the GGNRA's financial woes. But I am not going to donate my First Amendment rights to their garage sale.

The GGNRA's mandate is to maintain the beach as a public resource, not to restrict its use to balance their budget.

### Permits

While I'll stand aside if others want to obtain a permit for our gathering, I don't want to be part of that process. The only valid reason for a permit is as courtesy to other beach-users (mainly to avoid double-bookings). At Ocean Beach this is not a problem, as there is no shortage of space.

I don't believe we should ask permission to exercise our Constitutional rights. There is no legitimate reason that any GGNRA officials need to know of or monitor our presence. If they do feel the need, we informed them repeatedly at the hearings of our ritual dates. That is sufficient.

The undoubted effect of the new policy will be to discourage people from gathering at the beach. Should we cooperate? Sometimes I think the administrative vision of society is that people are always either at home, at work, or in their cars. No one ever sets foot outside except homeless people and criminals. The lines are clearly drawn, and the police can harass anyone who dares walk down the street.

Sound like I'm joking? This is the *de facto* condition in half the cities on Earth, including a lot of cities in the United States.

And you see can why — it *is* easier to administer a docile, home-bound population than a bunch of people whose idea of spirituality is building a bonfire and running into the ocean.

### A Winnable Issue

Besides being a righteous cause, this is a very winnable issue. A friend who works with the Ocean Beach task force told me that the GGNRA dreads the idea of confrontation, particularly with a spiritual group.

If we make it clear that we have a traditional right to gather and build bonfires at the beach — and that *all* people have that right, not just privileged groups — we could have an impact beyond our numbers. We could help render the restrictive policy unenforceable.

This is our chance to be heard. There may be one more round of hearings before the new policy is announced. If you want to be notified, or if you have information on this topic to share, please contact me.



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Reclaiming Quarterly presents

# Solstice Bonfire Do's & Don'ts

*RQ's ace reporter Esmeralda RagingWitch attended the GGNRA's recent public hearings and came back with these notes on Beach Bonfire Etiquette.*

## DO Burn:

- clean, untreated firewood
- construction leftovers with no nails, paint, etc
- old spells and other organic magical workings
- old love letters (remove staples and paperclips)
- thoughts or feelings that you want to let go of
- this flyer (after you've read and memorized it)

## DON'T Burn:

- wood with nails, paint, varnish, or treated wood of any kind
- pallets (contain nails), plywood (glue) or driftwood (creosote)
- metal of any kind or quantity
- candles and wax, or plastic and other synthetic materials
- paper with staples or paperclips
- other Witches

## Cleanup Courtesy

At the end of the ritual, douse the fire completely and bury the coals. Please carry out your trash, and any remains, dishes, towels, and/or small children's toys.

Special reminder — the Goddess dears

*Prepared by Reclaiming Quarterly magazine  
quarterly@reclaiming.org, (415) 251-1111*

**Beach  
Bonfires  
Threatened**

This flyer was passed out  
by RQ at Winter Solstice  
— see letter for details!

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