



Press Release

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Contact:
Sean Smith (415) 544-0790, ext. 19

Park Service's Jetski Plan for Gulf Islands Full of Holes

180 Degree Policy Change Not Supported By Facts

San Francisco: Bluewater Network experts recently reviewed the National Park Service's (NPS) personal watercraft (PWC) assessment for Gulf Island's National Seashore (GUIS) and found it is contradicted by an early Park Service determination, violates federal law, and fails to best protect park resources, wildlife and visitor safety. PWC, better known by the trade name jetski, are known to cause significant damage to air and water quality, visitor enjoyment, public health and safety, threatened and endangered species, soundscapes, and wildlife.

"The Park Service's new jetski plan takes more twists and turns than a typical kid on the thrillcraft," said Sean Smith. "A total jetski ban best protects resources, wildlife and the public and it's time to sink the NPS flawed plan once and for all."

In 2001, the NPS conducted a similar review of the thrillcraft and determined the operation to be "inappropriate" for GUIS and authorized an April 2002 ban on the machines. The 2001 determination specifically found that any PWC operation would inflict unacceptable damage to resources and wildlife. In stark contrast to the 2001 decision, the NPS now states that renewed PWC operation can coexist with park resources and wildlife. However, the NPS presents no new information to support this 180-degree policy change.

Bluewater Network's review also found that the 2004 plan violates federal law such as the National Environmental Policy Act, the Marine Mammal Protect Act (MMPA), and the Organic Act. For instance, researchers have found that no wake speed PWC operation in shallow waters can be harmful to marine mammals such as the Florida Manatee, and is therefore a clear violation of the MMPA.

Finally, the 2004 plan breaks a 2001 settlement agreement between the NPS and Bluewater Network. The agreement requires the Park Service to conduct in-depth site specific investigations if long-term jetski operation is to be authorized at any park unit. In the 2004 plan, the NPS readily admits that it didn't conduct those site specific studies and doesn't have current information on issues such as visitor enjoyment, wildlife, and water quality.

Bluewater Network believes the NPS change in course is the result of political meddling. In April of 2001, an internal email shows that Secretary of Interior Gale Norton ordered the Park Service to cease enforcement of a jetski ban at Gulf Islands and provide justification for the Superintendent's decision to close the seashore to PWC.

The public comment period on the PWC plan ends today.