



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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LANDMARK SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT SUBSTANTIALLY IMPROVES ACCESSIBILITY TO GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATIONAL AREA

Berkeley, CA – March 17, 2014 – Disability Rights Advocates (DRA) and the National Park Service (NPS) have entered into a landmark settlement agreement that will significantly improve access to Golden Gate National Recreational Area (GGNRA) for the thousands of people with mobility and vision disabilities who visit GGNRA each year. This agreement is the first comprehensive settlement in the country that will increase the accessibility of a federal park system.

GGNRA attracts more than 13 million diverse visitors every year. Set on more than 75,000 acres of land and water from San Mateo to Marin County, GGNRA is the country's largest national park in an urban area. The park encompasses national landmarks including Alcatraz, the Presidio, the Marin Headlands, Muir Woods, Crissy Field, and Forts Point and Mason. It contains 1,273 plant and animal species, encompasses 59 miles of bay and ocean shoreline, and has military fortifications that span centuries of California history from the Spanish conquistadors to Cold War-era Nike missile sites.

The settlement provides park visitors with mobility and vision disabilities greater access to GGNRA's trails, beaches, facilities, exhibits, publications, and visitor's centers. A few highlights of the agreement include:

- Wheelchair access to trails at Lands End, Marin Headlands, Mori Point, and Muir Woods.
- Beach access routes at several popular beaches.
- Beach wheelchairs and seasonal, wheelchair-accessible beach mats at many of the most popular Bay Area beaches.
- Braille, audio, and tactile orientation signs, guides, and route maps for visitors with vision impairments.
- Park staff and volunteer accessibility training and availability to lead guided tours for disabled visitors.

- Expanded access reviews for new construction and alterations to ensure full access compliance.
- A dedicated maintenance fund to ensure that existing and new access features are kept in accessible condition.

In addition to these and a host of other required access improvement projects, GGNRA has committed to spend at least \$3 million completing other accessibility projects including the construction of a boardwalk at one or more beaches in Marin County, accessible picnicking and restrooms at Rodeo Beach, and adding the new Quick Response Code access features to existing wayside exhibits. Quick Response Codes allow visitors with smart phones to access the complete information in the exhibit in multiple accessible formats by connecting to GGNRA's website. This is the first time this new technology will be used in a park setting.

DRA's Executive Director Larry Paradis commented: "Disability Rights Advocates commends the National Park Service and GGNRA for implementing these new projects to improve access to parks for people with disabilities. GGNRA contains some of the world's most beautiful and historically significant sites. People with disabilities for too long have been excluded from many of the experiences offered by national parks, experiences that many people cherish. These range from watching a sunset from an ocean-side beach, to visiting the redwoods, to walking a trail through wilderness, to visiting historic structures. This settlement provides a model for federal and state parks nationwide to be inclusive of all people in our community."

Plaintiff Lori Gray, a wheelchair user with a visual impairment, organizes and leads trips for groups of people with various disabilities to facilitate outdoor experiences and the enjoyment of the natural wonders of the Bay Area. Gray stated, "These improvements will allow current and future generations of visitors with disabilities to fully experience the unique recreational opportunities GGNRA has to offer."

Eugene Lozano, Jr., First Vice President for organizational plaintiff California Council of the Blind, commented: "The settlement will provide opportunities that have previously not existed for persons who are blind or have low vision when visiting GGNRA. Without the settlement, the majority of exhibits and facilities would not be accessible to the visually impaired community. This settlement will facilitate greater independence and assimilation."

Disability Rights Advocates is one of the leading nonprofit disability rights legal centers in the nation. With offices in Berkeley and New York City, DRA's mission is to advance equal rights and opportunities for people with all types of disabilities nationwide. DRA recently prevailed at trial in the class-action lawsuit challenging New York City's failure to plan for the needs of persons with disabilities in large scale disasters such as Hurricane Sandy. DRA is also currently challenging the County of Alameda's failure to provide a private and independent vote for blind voters. More information can be found at www.dralegal.org.