



State Park and Recreation Commission

June 17, 2022

STAFF REPORT: Proposed Renaming Negro Bar Day Use Area, Folsom SRA
STAFF: Alex Stehl, Deputy Director, Strategic Planning & Recreation Services
SUBJECT: State Park Facility Naming Proposal

Summary

This Staff Report identifies recommendations for the Director to address long-standing public interest in renaming Negro Bar Day Use Area at Folsom State Recreation Area (SRA). The Commission is being asked to provide review, hear public comment, and recommended action for the Director to address this issue.

Secretary of the Natural Resources Agency, Wade Crowfoot, has challenged the Natural Resources Agency and California State Parks (State Parks) to Listen, Commit, and Act to truly make California for All. This generational moment calls for State Parks to take stock of and critically reexamine our past, looking specifically at contested place names, monuments, and interpretation in our State Parks.

An internal survey conducted by State Parks in the summer of 2020 made clear that we must act to identify and remove residual derogatory place names. In September 2020 Director Quintero announced the State Parks initiative to identify and address these issues within the system called *Reexamining our Past*. State Parks is closely coordinating with Governor Newsom's administration and Secretary Crowfoot on this effort.

Discussion

Negro Bar Day-Use Naming Issue

One of the more long-standing park facility naming issues is at Negro Bar Day-Use Area within Folsom Lake State Recreation Area in Sacramento County. Over the years an array of stakeholders has discussed this specific facility name and suggested to both change and/or retain the name. Those in support of change, naming "Negro" as a dated, derogatory term, and others in opposition, concerned with the potential loss of recognition the name provides to African American presence and participation in the California Gold Rush in this area. The name "Negro Bar" appears on park signage, website, brochures, and maps. Other uses of the name "Negro Bar" appear on the USGS Topographic Map. Members of the public have also requested the California Board of Geographic Names (CBGN) to change the official geographic location name. The CBGN has the authority to act on and address that specific request.

Public Participation Process

State Parks has received, and been gathering, public input and comment on the Negro Bar naming discussion for many years. One of the most notable attempts at change occurred in 1999. In response to formal requests for a name change for the facility, and meetings and consultation with local community groups and stakeholders, the Department determined not to change the name at that time. The decision received both positive and negative response from the interested constituents at the time, and throughout the ensuing decades.

The current naming issue again arose in 2018, when an online petition to have the facility renamed was started, citing the offensive nature of the term “Negro.” Additionally, in 2020 a formal request was initiated with the U.S. Board of Geographic Names for a change of the official geographic name of the site.

Since 2018 State Parks has responded with numerous outreach efforts toward settling the long-standing naming issue at Negro Bar. State Parks’ Gold Fields District staff have been at the forefront of response efforts to gather input on a possible name change, and potential options for new names, while addressing concerns about negatively impacting recognition of African American history at the site.

Subsequently the Department has held numerous public/community listening sessions, meetings, surveys, individual meetings and contacts with scholars and experts on the subject. Some notable efforts included a 2020 meeting with concerned citizens and stakeholders. Participants included the above-mentioned petitioners, City of Folsom officials, African American community groups and associations, local and regional community groups and organizations such as The Folsom Historical Society, Chinese American community representatives from the Locke Foundation, and Native Americans representing the United Auburn Indian Community and the Shingle Springs Band of Miwok Indians.

Public stakeholder meetings in April 2021 included interested community members and those individuals seeking further participation in the naming process. Over 50 community members participated in the stakeholder meeting. The name, interpretation, and history of the park facilities was discussed at each meeting. At each meeting, a majority of the attendees recommended renaming the day use facilities. A subsequent on-line survey had similar input recommending a change and suggested possible new names.

Additionally, the Department has received input from noted scholars of African American history and other community members and groups from throughout the state requesting that the historic name be retained, or to find a new name that does not represent the same systemic racist societal conventions that led to the origins of such derogatory place names historically.

Analysis

The Department has weighed the recent public and expert input, analysis of existing historical scholarship of the site and its association with the history of this area of the American River, as well as substantive concerns with both the current name’s derogatory connotation to many in the regional and local African American communities.

Public and stakeholder input provided significant evidence that a majority of those engaged are either offended or see value in a change from the current name. Some community individuals expressing that they are personally uncomfortable or do not feel safe in visiting the site due to the connotation of the name. Concern was also received from community members and interested parties fearing a name change that would lead to elimination of, or reduction of, recognition of the African American history of this area of the American River gold fields.

State Parks also acknowledges that a name change, or name retention, cannot be the summation or conclusion of the greater issue. Following on the Department's Relevancy and History Program and Reexamining the Past Initiative, the department must develop a more robust, engaged, and inclusive interpretation and education program at the Negro Bar site and throughout Folsom State Recreation Area.

As recent research and community engagement efforts have revealed, there is a great need in tapping historians and scholars, as well as developing new historical/interdisciplinary and community-driven research to both improve interpretive content and to equitably engage with our diverse California communities. Effort must be made to engage both scholars and interested community members on better interpreting the African American Gold Rush experience in this area, as well as better recognize the multi-cultural contexts associated with that history and the local region.

It is therefore clear to the Department that there is a need to address both the immediate issue of acknowledging the offensive nature of the current, long-standing name while finding the most appropriate, accurate, and applicable long-term naming options for this state park facility.

To that end, the Department has recently partnered with the California African American Museum (CAAM). CAAM is the state agency charged with research, preservation and interpreting the history, art, and culture of African Americans in California and the western United States. The overarching goal of this partnership is to mobilize the professional expertise, community contacts and perspectives of CAAM to those of State Parks as an essential element in enhancing and improving the interpretation and education efforts related to African American historical and cultural interpretation throughout the State Park system. These two state agencies are working on an agreement to assist in the advancement and establishment and implementation of well-researched and properly-contexted historical scholarship and interpretation of the African American experience in California.

Tapping the knowledge, expertise and community relationships of CAAM provides a long-recognized opportunity for State Parks to institute best practices in addressing missing or inaccurate narratives and scholarship on California African American history. It is also essential in how State Parks addresses the larger societal issues of how inherent, systemic racism has affected the development of this state--and its state park system--historically

Recommendation

State Parks recommends a multi-step approach in addressing both the immediate need to remove the offensive term from the day use area name at Folsom SRA and to engage in a thorough and comprehensive historical research effort to identify the most appropriate, accurate and applicable long-term name for this facility.

The recommendation includes the following actions: 1) temporary name change, 2) intensive historical research effort and 3) enhanced, comprehensive research-based, community-driven interpretive programming that reflects the significant contributions of the African

American community in California's Gold Rush experience, along with that of other associated, and underrepresented California Gold Rush era histories and voices.

Temporary Re-Naming

The first step would be for the Director to temporarily change the name for Negro Bar Day-Use Area at Folsom State Recreation Area to Black Miners Bar Day-Use Area. This step would acknowledge the legitimate concerns of community members who find the current name derogatory, offensive and a barrier to their ability to comfortably visit or enjoy this park facility.

The Department acknowledges that any name change may be met with some reluctance by some individuals or groups. The recommended interim name of "Black Miners Bar" is reflective of, and the result of, discussions with interested stakeholders and community members to find a new name that meets both goals of removing the offensive term and recognizing the site's historical contexts. It also has been noted that Black Miners Bar as having a similar originating context to the term it is meant to replace.

Intensive Historical Research Effort

The second recommended action is to engage our partners at CAAM on an in-depth, comprehensive historical research effort on the history of Negro Bar, Folsom and the surrounding area. CAAM and State Parks historians will coordinate with top scholars to ensure that best practices in historical research, interpretation and methodology is undertaken in this effort.

The agencies agree to complete this intensive research effort within one year, resulting in a thorough research report with potential naming options based on historical scholarship. The research report will be foundational to providing viable long-term naming options for the facility to meet community and historic interpretation goals.

From the identified historical scholarship presented in the research report, along with additional public and interested party input, the Department can then be more fully informed in making a long-term naming recommendation that meets all the aforementioned goals while ensuring that the new name does not represent the same systemic racism that led to the origins of such derogatory place names historically.

Enhanced Cultural Interpretation at Folsom SRA

The Department will also utilize the research report will also provide a foundation for updated and enhanced interpretative programming at Folsom SRA. Following on the Department's Relevancy and History Program and Reexamining the Past Initiative, the department will develop a more robust, engaged, and inclusive interpretation and education program at the Negro Bar/Black Miners Bar site and throughout Folsom State Recreation Area.

The interpretation and education programming will be the long-term benefit of coalescing the collective energy of all interested parties to improve the quality and inclusion of the multiple historical narratives and lessons that this site provides both local and statewide visitors to this popular state park.

Commission Action

For review and recommendation

Attachments

Facility Overview

Negro Bar day-use facilities are located on the northwestern shore of Lake Natoma, one of several access points into the Folsom Lake State Recreation Area (FLSRA), directly across the lake from historic downtown Folsom and approximately 20 miles northeast of Sacramento. FLSRA consists of land owned by the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) and California State Parks. These lands are managed in partnership with the BOR Central California Area Office, and the California State Parks' Gold Fields District the Negro Bar facilities consist of nearly 150 acres of improved and unimproved areas immediately adjacent to Lake Natoma.

Much of the day use area is developed for public use. There are three group campsites, maintenance and office buildings, and a network of paved and natural surface trails. The day use facilities also include a paddle sports concession, as well as the training center for California State Parks junior lifeguard program.

Current discussions with stakeholder groups have focused on providing interpretive panels and signage that will reflect the historical use of this location. On-going development in the day use facilities provides an opportunity to many of the stakeholders to advance their interpretation and understanding of this location.

Bureau of Reclamation

The Bureau of Reclamation's Central California Area Office (BOR CCAO) owns the majority of land currently identified as The Negro Bar Day Use Facilities. Representatives from BOR CCAO have attended both public stakeholder meetings and California State Parks updates any new findings or decisions at quarterly annual meetings between BOR and State Parks. BOR seems agreeable with maintaining or changing the name and is awaiting a decision from California State Parks before initiating a name change.

U.S. Board on Geographic Names

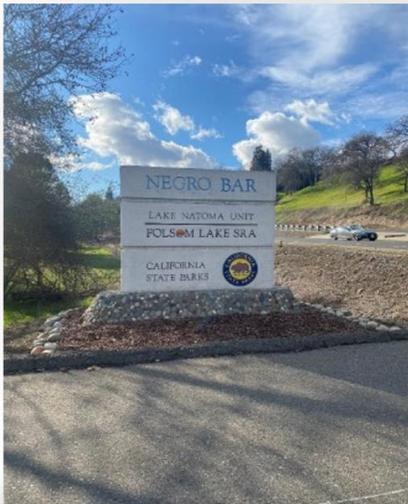
USBGN has been in constant contact with California State Parks since the submission of name change petitions. USBGN is also amenable to maintaining or changing the name of the day use facilities and is awaiting a decision by California State Parks before initiating a name change on the USGS Topographic Quadrangle.



Day Use Facilities and Historic Negro Bar Town Site



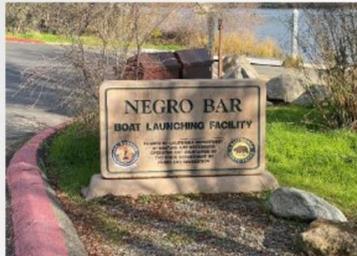
FLSRA Current Facilities and Signs



Main Entrance Sign



Greenback Rd.

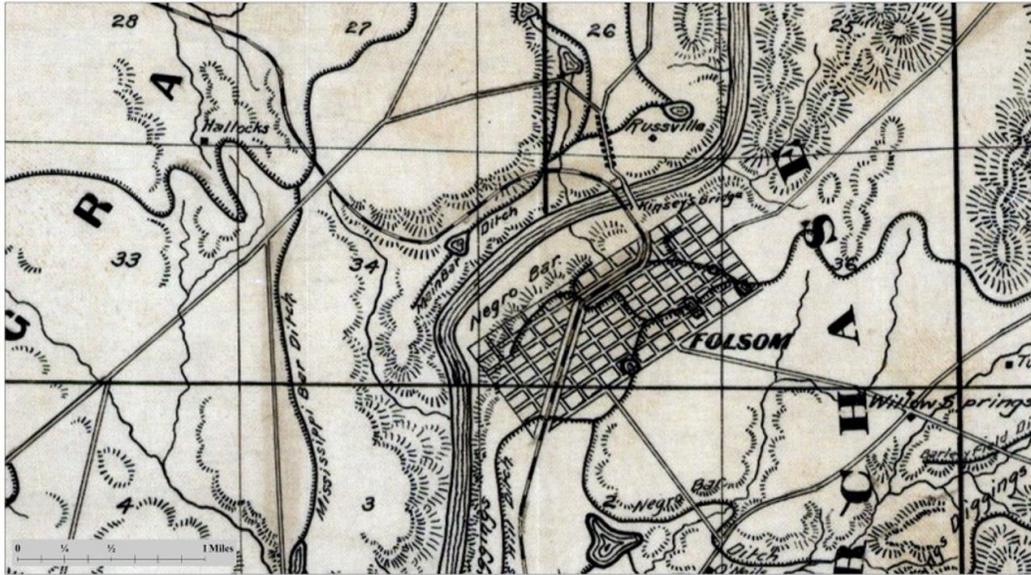


Boat Launch



1910 Natoma Water & Mining Company Map

Depicting the town of Folsom, Negro Bar, and Main Bar



1859 Folsom Plat Map with 1855 Plat Map Overlay

Negro Bar Depicted at Blocks 11, 12, and 13





1854 RR Map by Theodore Judah

