



Letter from Woodstock
Rolf Diamant

Values We Hold Dear

LAST AUGUST, Greg Moore, president and chief executive officer of the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, posted on the organization's homepage its perspective on the National Park Service (NPS) decision to approve a First Amendment permit for the proposed Patriot Prayer event at Crissy Field in Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

As the nonprofit partner of Golden Gate National Recreation Area and the Presidio Trust, the conservancy made the restoration of Crissy Field an early signature project. Moore's thoughtful statement actually looks beyond the issue of the permit, and, in a much broader context, addresses not only the conservancy's own visions and values, but also speaks to the motivations and expectations of all people who answer the call of park stewardship, public service, and environmental humanism. The statement, at its heart, is a thoughtful reaffirmation of why we create and work to sustain national parks and other protected areas and why we must not retreat on progress that has been made in our national parks on behalf of conservation, equity, and inclusion.

I will not go into the full story of the ultimately aborted August 26th Crissy Field event (canceled by its organizers at the eleventh hour), but suffice it to say that other events staged by the small alt-right Patriot Prayer group, which describes itself as fighting big government, have been a magnet for white nationalists of various affiliations. San Francisco officials feared that the event, billed as a "Freedom Rally," would trigger violent confrontations in the park. Given the broad diversity of park users at Crissy Field, Patriot Prayer's selection of this rally venue was perceived as deliberately provocative. In the eyes of many people, including a number of young people of color at the conservancy's Crissy Field Center, the proposed event was profoundly disturbing and even personally threatening coming so soon after the violence at Charlottesville.

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Every national park has at least one designated area where free speech and freedom of assembly rights guaranteed by the First Amendment to the Constitution are accommodated through a no-cost permit system. While NPS regulates aspects of the activity to protect park resources, it never regulates the content of the message. As long as technical requirements are met, no group that wants to lawfully assemble to exercise First Amendment rights can be denied a permit. NPS eventually issued a First Amendment permit for the rally with a comprehensive list of conditions attached.

In the days leading up to the event, concurrent scheduled public programs were canceled, facilities and stores planned to close, and law enforcement was mobilized. It was in this context that the conservancy released the following statement seeking to reassure its staff and volunteers, members, donors, agency partners, and the general public just where the organization stood, and to refocus attention on the larger purposes of its work. In this, my 18th Letter from Woodstock, I have included most of the statement as it appeared on August 23.

***The Parks Conservancy Perspective on the Decision of
the National Park Service to Approve a First Amendment Permit for
the Patriot Prayer Event on Crissy Field on August 26, 2017***

Acknowledging a Decision

Today, the National Park Service (NPS) announced its decision to go forward with a First Amendment permit for an event on Crissy Field. The Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy is a nonprofit partner to the parks and does not have jurisdiction over permits issued for events and activities in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

We acknowledge the complex factors affecting this decision. We appreciate the priority that the NPS gave to public safety in its consideration. And we reflect upon our First Amendment rights to free speech and the NPS obligation to follow federal law and policy regarding this fundamental American principle.

Affirming the Parks Conservancy's Vision and Values

Given recent national events, this decision requires an even deeper reflection. The Parks Conservancy firmly believes that our national parks celebrate diversity—as places of welcome and enjoyment for people of every age, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, religion, or gender identity. That principle is fundamental to our democracy and the unique American invention of a National Park System. Our national parks are places of inclusion.

Through the ongoing work of the Conservancy's Crissy Field Center and many other programs with a multitude of community partners, the Conservancy continues to advance this vision of inclusion. For almost 20 years, the Conservancy has carried these principles forward by encouraging people of all backgrounds to

enjoy Crissy Field and offering special programs to reach a broader cross-section of our community. We believe our public lands—like the nation itself—are made stronger by diversity.

Rejecting Hate and Intolerance

Recently, events in and around a park in Charlottesville, Virginia demonstrated how our public places can be invaded. Emancipation Park was overtaken by those who promote intolerance and exclusion. The Conservancy stands directly against all forms of hatred, bigotry, or oppression as anathema to our American ideals, as well as to the values of our national parks as places of welcome and inclusion. We stand against movements that promote and foster this reprehensible thinking, including white supremacy, white nationalism, and neo-Nazism—and any other spokesperson or movement spreading intolerance or hatred.

Recalling Crissy Field as Common Ground

The potential for hatred and intolerance being promoted by groups or individuals on Crissy Field is especially poignant to us because, in 1999, the Conservancy led the effort to restore Crissy Field from an old military airfield to a national park for all. Our values embraced—and continue to embrace—diversity and inclusion. Today, Crissy Field is a beloved national park that recognizes and shares the Presidio's complex history. It is where native peoples hunted and fished. It has seen immigrants pass through the Golden Gate and into San Francisco Bay. It was an airfield that saw many aviation milestones during the early 20th century. And it was home to a school that trained Japanese Americans as linguists during World War II—even as orders to incarcerate their families were carried out in the Presidio. Crissy Field is a place replete with meaning, a space for reflection and recreation, and a destination park that welcomes over a million visitors every year.

Advancing Our Vision

With the recent events in Charlottesville and the upcoming event on Crissy Field this Saturday, the Conservancy recommits itself to our vision of diversity and inclusion at Crissy Field and throughout the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. There is still much work ahead of us—and work that we proudly and humbly advance. Not everyone has easy access to our parks or the comfort that they are welcome. Our parks often lack the facilities and programs that support and serve a broad cross-section of our community. And our parks aren't equally enjoyed by all members of our community.

We embrace the opportunity to serve more kids, reach more people, and make the benefits of our national parks available to a wider spectrum of communities—with a focus on kids and families who need our parks the most, due to lack of access to nature and the outdoors.

Reflecting Upon and Learning from Our National Parks

Even while there is work to do, we can look to our National Park System as a source of introspection and reflection. Many national park sites and national monuments commemorate important progress in human rights, and also reflect upon times of intolerance, bigotry, and oppression. The Birmingham Civil Rights National Monument, Stonewall National Monument, César E. Chávez National Monument, Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site, the Statue of Liberty National Monument, and other national park sites speak to civil rights, celebrate American immigrants, and honor progress in social justice. Other places such as the Japanese American Internment Camp at Manzanar National Historic Site, the Indian Memorial at the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument, Angel Island Immigration Station National Historic Landmark, and many other sites challenge us to reflect upon and remember the tragedies of intolerance and oppression—and its misguided consequences.

Asking You to Join Us

Only through reflection and action can we advance our democratic ideals as represented in our national parks. The Parks Conservancy asks our community of friends, supporters, and partners to continue to join us on the long and important journey of “Parks For All Forever.”

Thanking Our Partners, Volunteers, Supporters, and Community

The Conservancy extends our profound gratitude to our public agency partners, to our thousands of dedicated volunteers, to our scores of community partners, to our members and donors, and to the youth we serve who give us hope for the future. And that future is fundamental to the founding principle of our National Park System—to preserve these timeless places for the “enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations.”

The August 26 event on Crissy Field occupies one day. But the future is ours to create with the values we hold dear.

Greg Moore

President & CEO

Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy

Some years ago there was a series on public radio called *This I Believe* where people had ten minutes or so on air to give testament to their basic values and beliefs. Much like *This I Believe*, the conservancy’s statement clearly set out a moral compass, and, in the process, models an ethical standard for a park-related *community of purpose* made up of a broad spectrum of park friends groups, cooperating associations, educational programs, foundations, and other environmental and community organizations. In all probability in the days ahead,

other public spaces, including national parks, will be used and abused by purveyors of hate and intolerance—the antithesis of what parks represent, as cornerstones of a civil and inclusive society. And sooner, rather than later, park and conservation organizations across the nation, as part of this expanding *community of purpose*, may need to speak up, as the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy has done, and make clear to all the values we hold dear.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Roy Dannant". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and a long, sweeping tail that extends to the right.