

Personal Watercraft Statement

Thank you for allowing my statement on personal watercraft near the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve to be read by Ms. Miller.

The Fitzgerald Marine Reserve is one of the largest reserves in the state, extending from Point Montara in the North, 15,500 feet to Pillar Point in the South. The Reserve does not include Pillar Point but stops short of the jetty at Pillar Point Harbor by about 1500 feet. However, the Reserve boundaries do include 40 acres of Pillar Point Marsh located within the inner harbor. The Reserve has also been classified by the state's Water Quality Control Board as "an area of special biological significance," identified for increased water quality protection from the ocean and watershed sources. And the Coastal Commission is currently studying the Reserve to determine if it will be part of a two-year pilot program aimed at monitoring and restoring critical coastal habitats.

The Marine Reserve is directly adjacent to the Mavericks' surfing area and the lesser known surfing spots of Ross's Cove is entirely within the reserve.

The Reserve's staff and our many volunteer docents oppose the use of jet ski's near or in the Marine Reserve. This is because the reserve is a haul out and breeding area for a colony of harbor seals that have been there, as evidenced by remains in local Indian middens, for at least 1600 years. There are 5 haul out sites in the reserve and another nearby at Pillar Point. This is a breeding colony of harbor seals with a "high home fidelity" population that numbers in the summer as many as 180. Once they establish a habitat, they stay. This year we had 11 pups born in the reserve. The number of births here has varied greatly over the past 6 years, with as few as zero pups too as many as 16 in 1999.

This is a relatively low number since the replacement rate is considered to be about 20%, thus a population of 150 to 180 seals should have a birth rate of about 30 to 35 seals per year. As I mentioned above, the number of births here has seen as few as zero pups to as many as 16. We believe that one of the reasons that the birthing rate at the reserve is low is because of the number of frequent disturbances caused by human visitors. For example no pups have been borne at our main visitor entrance at California St. in Moss Beach, most are birthed in the Southern and more secluded reaches of the Reserve, which is the closest to the Maverick's surfing area site.

Small vehicles such as jet skis can cause significant disturbance to the seals in the reserve and at Pillar Point. Over a two hour period a jet ski rider can cover a lot of area and can cruise the entire length of the reserve several times over.

Every year, I have seen otters at the Reserve and in the kelp beds in the southern end of the Reserve. They've been observed in the protective areas of Pillar Point harbor as recently as last weekend by Montara resident Kathryn

Slater-Carter. There is feed here for them – red, purple urchins and crabs. We had 25 at the Reserve in 1999 through 2000 just north of Ross' Cove. Mike Kenner from UCSC and I conducted a study that year, and were surprised to see they were actually hauling out which is unusual and only seen at Montana del Oro State Park near Morro Bay. At least a dozen of them wintered here that same year.

I have seen jet skis in the reserve several times while on duty at our main visitor entrance at Moss Beach located at the center of the Reserve. Most recently, late last year, I was kayaking (on my own time) off Mavericks on a calm day headed towards flat rock and Ross's cove and observed a lone jet ski rider for about two hours in the low surf near Pillar Point. He then made several trips up past flat rock to the Distillery, and to Moss Beach. All this was done within the space of less than two hours.

Their loud noises, quick unpredictable turns and access to shallow water give jet ski's the ability to invade areas of the reserve not previously accessible to humans, but important to the resting and reproductive behavior of the seals. Seals will respond in panic to the loud, rapid movements of the skis', resulting over time, to a much lower viability of the seal population.

Jet ski's in marine mammal haul outs such as the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve and adjacent Pillar Point area is an inappropriate and a destructive force as far as marine mammals, and sea otters for that matter. Their use significantly alters seal reproductive behavior and eventually forces them to abandon haul out sites that they have occupied for centuries. I ask you not to approve the use of jet skis' in this area.

Bob Breen
Naturalist, Fitzgerald Marine Reserve
Vice Chair, Gulf of the Farallones National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council