

Dear Lucien Plauzoles, Santa Monica Bay Audubon Society, and Members of the Santa Monica City Council,

I am responding to a letter dated May 26, 2005 on Santa Monica Audubon Society letterhead from Lucien Plauzoles and addressed to members of the SM City Council.

I want to thank Mr. Plauzoles for acknowledging the strong possibility that "our society absolutely needs a dog beach...(as) convenience for owners and canines." This is a first step in the coming together of well meaning groups who share a love of animals and the environment and want to enable them to live happily and safely on our shared resources. Since most groups are coming at the issues from differing perspectives, if we are to make real progress, it is essential that we all respect each others' concerns.

Mr. Plauzoles recommends that we locate the dogs on the beaches south of Pico which has fewer birds and more people. Unleash The Beach has said from the beginning that we are willing to accept ANY part of the beach as a dog zone that is deemed most suitable as long as we with our dogs have recreational access to the water. It is often a struggle for land managers to develop policies that ensure coexistence of wildlife and recreation. This requires an understanding of how wildlife responds to various forms of recreational activities and the spatial context in which the activities occur. Studies show that the mere presence of a person can frighten birds away. This is why there are fewer bird species on the south side of Santa Monica. However, this is also a reason why most people seem to think this would NOT be the best area for a dog zone. The fact that the area IS highly used by people seems to be the major consideration.

The northern part of the SM Beach is the least used by people. There are large homes along the sand. In addition to your concern about the birds, it is our understanding that the residents there may not want to share a section as a dog beach. This is also why your concern that the northern bike path "could easily become a well-used dogway" is not a likely event. The general population does not approach the beach from the northern side where they would have to hike long distances past the mansions to the dog beach. The parking lots in the north are also relatively small. To further diminish your concerns, the beach is very wide both there and at the proposed site. The birding generally occurs much closer to the water,

generally more than 500 feet away.

Peter Baye (US Fish and Wildlife Service Biologist) has made recommendations regarding the protections of the Snowy Plover. These include establishing flexible, seasonally rotated exclosures to protect plovers against humans, pets, and wild predators. The seasonal temporary fence which could be removed when the plovers left the area and repositioned when they return has been very effective in areas of concentrated usage where the beach is large such as the Cape Cod National Seashore and Santa Barbara and can be adopted in Santa Monica.

In addition to this protection, the 1996 National Park Service study of Ocean Beach in San Francisco indicated disturbance of the Snowy Plover by humans and/or dogs occurred when they approached within 50 feet of the plover. The current primary threats to the Western Snowy Plover on our beaches include; people, crows, gulls, shrikes, kite flying, fireworks, mechanized sand raking, and pollution such as trash left on the beach. Crows, ravens and shrikes are the natural predators of the Snowy Plover. No current studies have found dogs to be predators of the Snowy Plover.

Claims of harm to wildlife by off leash dogs have been shown to be overblown and inaccurate. It is important to note that the proposed location for the dog beach is approximately ½ mile or approximately 5 city blocks from the identified wintering site of the plover. We are confident that the snowy plover will remain undisturbed by dogs using the dog beach at the proposed location. Rational land use management can protect the wildlife on SM Beach while allowing off leash recreation to be established on a well-regulated 2% of our beachfront.

Sincerely,  
Georja Umano Jones  
Founder and President  
Unleash The Beach  
<http://www.UnleashTheBeach.org>