



REPORT

THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO TO THE PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD

DATE ISSUED: February 7, 2024

REPORT NO.: 101

ATTENTION: Parks and Recreation Board
Agenda of February 15, 2024

SUBJECT: Proposal for Bottom Scratchers Commemorative Plaque at Ellen Browning Scripps Park

SUMMARY

Issue – Should the Parks and Recreation Board recommend approval of a proposal from the San Diego Bottom Scratchers for a commemorative plaque to be installed at Ellen Browning Scripps Park?

Department Recommendation

Recommend approval of proposal.

Other Recommendations

The following group has reviewed and considered the proposed project. Actions taken and recommendations made by this group is listed under the “Discussion” section below.

- La Jolla Parks and Beaches, Inc. (LJPB), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit public benefit corporation

Fiscal Impact

The Parks and Recreation Department would use its staff to install the plaque. The preparation and installation process is estimated to take 2-3 hours. The proposed plaque (and the boulder it would be mounted on) will be provided by the San Diego Freedivers.

Water and Energy Conservation Status

The proposed commemorative plaque installation complies with all water and energy conservation guidelines contained in Council Policy 200-14.

Climate Action Plan (CAP) Impact

None.

Strategic/Tactical Equity Plan Impact

The proposed commemorative plaque helps achieve the “Protect & Enrich Every Neighborhood” Priority Area of Focus of the City of San Diego Strategic Plan by giving visitors to Ellen Browning Scripps Park the ability to experience local culture and history of diving and marine conservation in the San Diego area.

Environmental

None.

BACKGROUND

Bottom Scratchers

The San Diego Bottom Scratchers (“Bottom Scratchers”) is one of the earliest free-diving and spear fishing clubs in the United States. The club was formed in 1933 by Jack Prodanovich, Ben Stone, and Glenn Orr. Its members are widely acknowledged for inventing or improving on both diving and spearfishing techniques and equipment. They are credited with designing the first face masks, modern goggles, and snorkels, as well as for perfecting the rubber band-powered speargun design still in use today. Because they were pioneers of sport diving equipment, they inadvertently became some of the first underwater naturalists and advocates for conservation.

Free Diving

People have been free diving since the fifth century, especially in Korea and ancient Greece, where divers would harvest sponges off the ocean floor. An earlier form of free diving has been described throughout the Polynesian Islands and in Japan, but modern free diving, as we now know it, is said to have begun in San Diego. There has been no evidence of free diving found in the U.S. before the Bottom Scratchers club came to be. Bottom Scratchers swam only in a swimsuit and did so for many years until the wetsuit which was created well after World War II.

To be a member of the Bottom Scratchers, you had to meet the following requirements:

1. Hold your breath for three minutes while underwater.
2. Dive to a depth of up to sixty feet.
3. Catch a horn shark by hand.
4. Demonstrate how your contributions have and would advance the sport of free diving.
5. Receive a unanimous voted in support of your membership to the club.

Membership reached a high of 19 members. When the original members died, so did the club. Memorial markers were placed underwater off the coast of La Jolla in an area called “Tombstones”. Tombstones serves as an unofficial underwater memorial park and symbolic graveyard to commemorate the members of the Bottom Scratchers who have passed. Over time, memorial markers have been placed for other fallen watermen.

To formally recognize the contributions made by the Bottom Scratchers, the San Diego Freedivers, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization which supports fellowship among Southern

California freedivers, has prepared the proposal for the commemorative plaque to not only honor the Bottom Scratchers, but also preserve the history of freediving and spearfishing.

For more information on the San Diego Freedivers, please use the following link:

<https://www.sandiegofreedivers.com/>

See Attachment for the history and background concerning the Bottom Scratchers.

DISCUSSION

Community Support

On July 24, 2023, presentation was made by Volker Hoehne and Ken Hunrichs to La Jolla Parks and Beaches requesting support and approval of a proposal for placement of a 14" x 14" bronze plaque at Ellen Browning Scripps Park near Point La Jolla in honor of members of the "Bottom Scratchers" and their noteworthy contributions to marine conservation and diving. LJPB suggested revising the plaque wording, as well as provided input as to possible installation locations within the Park.

On August 28, 2023, La Jolla Parks and Beaches voted 11-1-0 in favor of the Bottom Scratcher's plaque proposal, specifically, the design, the revised wording, and placement at Point La Jolla in Ellen Browning Scripps Park. LJPB also acknowledged that the plaque's final placement would be subject to the City of San Diego Parks and Recreation Department.

Please see the following link for minutes for the July 24, 2023 and August 28, 2023 meetings:

<https://lajollaparksbeaches.org/minutes>

Plaque Specifications

The dimensions of the proposed plaque are the following: 12 inches across by 16 inches high. It is made of bronze and will be mounted on a boulder that will be placed on a preexisting cement footprint next to a bench. The plaque will contain the following inscription:

"Since 1933, offshore from this beach access, the seafloor bears memorial markers to name and honor San Diego's most heralded underwater pioneers.

The San Diego Bottom Scratchers Dive Club.

The Bottom Scratchers dedicated every dive to preventing the waste of sea life and to helping others appreciate the wonders of the sea.

All who enter here fall under oath to do the same.

Plaque donated by San Diego Freedivers."

See the attached for more details.

ALTERNATIVES

NONE.

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February 7, 2024

Respectfully submitted,



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Cherlyn Cac
Senior Planner, Parks and Recreation

Attachment: PowerPoint Presentation

cc: Councilmember Joe La Cava, Council District 1