

✓ Long Marine Lab

Center for wildlife rehabilitation on schedule for summer opening

By **DONNA KIMURA**

Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — A world-class center that will treat marine wildlife poisoned by pollution is on schedule to open this summer in Santa Cruz.

Under construction near UC Santa Cruz's Long Marine Lab, the Oiled Wildlife Veterinary Care and Research Center will be a leading center for sea otter care and research.

"I think it will be a real addition to Santa Cruz County," said Dave Jessup, senior wildlife veterinarian for the state Fish and Game Department. "It gives us a place to

better understand the southern sea otter."

The otter was listed as "threatened" in 1977 because of its limited distribution along the California coast.

Overharvesting of the animals for their fur during the 18th and 19th centuries so reduced the population that the species was once thought to be extinct. The population now stands at about 2,400 from Point Ano Nuevo to Point Purisima in Santa Barbara County, based on a spring 1995 count.

Federal officials are considering the possibility of removing the southern sea otter from the endangered species list if the population

reaches about 2,650.

The otter should be a focus of the center, set to open around July. Other oiled wildlife also will be treated.

There is no other facility in the state of the same size and scope, Jessup said.

The state expects to have seven employees at the \$5 million center. It will work closely with its neighbors at Long Marine Lab.

In addition to caring for oiled marine wildlife, the facility will be a center for research into marine pollution and toxicology.

The project will go before the state Coastal Commission next month.

2-12-91