

# Dead trees to stay at Natural Bridges

## Trees- Pitch canker claims pines at state beach

By **HEATHER BOERNER**  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

At Natural Bridges State Beach, near a eucalyptus grove alive with monarch butterflies, is a virtual graveyard of Monterey pines. The trees, more than 60 of them, stand dead or dying, covered in lichen and still clinging to old pine cones.

**SANTA CRUZ** The trees are the victims of pitch canker, a disease that has killed Monterey pines around the region. With nearly every storm, the trees fall, breaking through the fence that runs along Swanton Boulevard and Delaware Avenue.

Are the trees an eyesore? Maybe. Are they going anywhere? Nope.

"State parks likes dead trees," said Tim Hyland, a resource ecologist for the Park Department's Santa Cruz office. "A lot of animals like them, woodpeckers and insects live on them, so our policy is not to cut them down when they die."

Instead, the department is going to replace the trees with cypress trees, as necessary, to shield the nearby Monarch grove beyond it

from winds. Last year, the department planted more than 50 cypresses to shield the overwintering butterfly habitat. This year, Hyland said, 20 more will be planted.

Natural Bridges State Beach is the third most popular state beach in the county, behind Seacliff and New Brighton. It is also the only natural preserve designated for Monarch butterflies in the state. Every year, thousands of visitors gather on viewing platforms to watch the butterflies sun themselves on the upper reaches of eucalyptus trees.

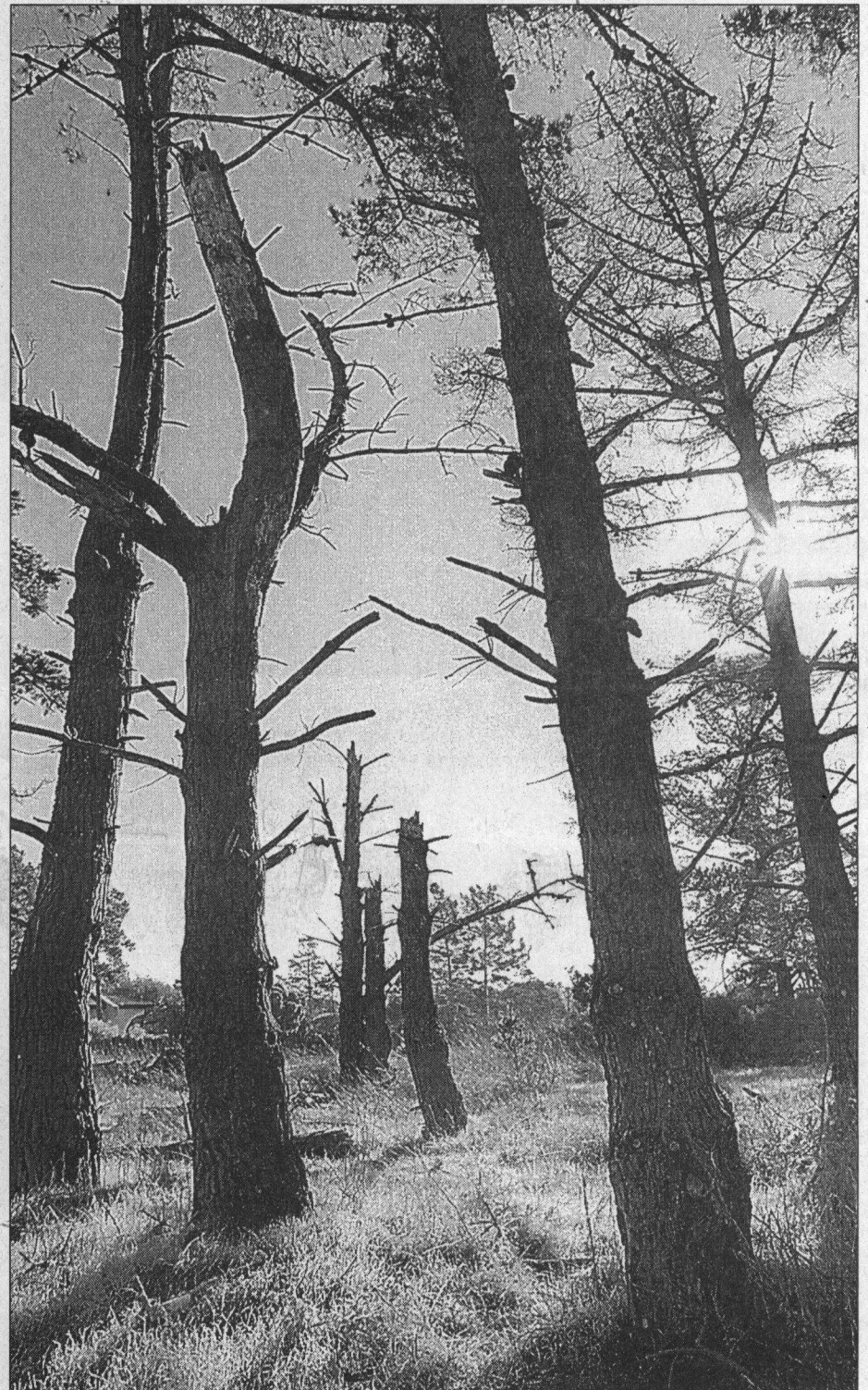
Compared to the butterflies, the pines are relative newcomers to the park. Only willows are native to Natural Bridges, and the pines were probably planted in the 1970s, Hyland said. The trees have a short life cycle, Hyland said — around 40 years. But pitch canker began invading the trees about 10 years ago. At the time, experts expected all of the trees to die off. But it's turned out that some trees with the disease remain alive.

Many of the pines at the New Brighton State Beach campground also are infected, and the Parks Department is replacing some of those, too, Hyland said.

"I'm not sure why they were planted in the first place," Hyland said. "I think it's just that people love trees. Now that they've died, our main goal is to continue to protect the butterfly groves."

Contact Heather Boerner at  
[hboerner@santa-cruz.com](mailto:hboerner@santa-cruz.com).

State parks maintenance worker Tim Tonsing checks out the latest storm damage at Natural Bridges, caused by a diseased, wind-toppled Monterey pine.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos

Dead and dying Monterey pines make for an eerie landscape at Natural Bridges State Park, where 98 percent of the pines have pitch canker. The trees will be left to topple naturally.