

✓ LONG MARINE LAB

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Santa Cruz may get oil-spill rescue center

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Long Marine Laboratory, on the coastal bluffs at the edge of Santa Cruz, could become California's research and rescue center for wildlife injured by oil spills.

Under legislation introduced by Assemblyman Sam Farr, the University of California, Santa Cruz marine studies facility would be designated as the main research and rescue station along the state's coastline. Such centers were authorized in a bill adopted by the Legislature last year in the wake of the Exxon Valdez oil spill in Alaska, the Carmel Democrat said.

In last year's bill, Farr said, several million dollars was set aside for the eventual establishment of marine wildlife rescue facilities along the coast. Some of the

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money was earmarked for research into the effects on wildlife of being caught in an oil slick.

“The law says these stations shall be established,” Farr said. “What I’m saying is, we’ve got the people with the know-how and we’ve got the facility, so let’s do it at Long Marine Lab.”

Both the research center and the chain of rescue stations would be designed to

save the lives of wildlife such as sea otters and other marine mammals as well as birds damaged by oil spills, he said.

Farr said he envisioned the Monterey Bay region, including the Long laboratory on the coast just north of Santa Cruz, as “a center of marine excellence, much the way that the Silicon Valley is the center of excellence in microelectronics.

“I think the ocean is our new frontier,

and I believe California can play a major role here, as we did in the exploration of space.”

He said the UC-Santa Cruz marine lab is a natural place to be the headquarters of the chain of coastal rescue stations.

“They have the facilities and they have the personnel,” Farr said.

A research toxicologist at Long said Monday the facility's work over the years

with marine mammals such as dolphins, seals, sea lions and otters has provided the expertise necessary for a center such as that envisioned in Farr's bill.

“We have the facilities, we have the expertise and we have experience with oil-spill work,” said Ron Tjeerdema, who studies the effects on marine organisms of cleanup agents used after such spills.

Farr's measure, Assembly Bill 203, has an urgency clause that would require that the rescue and rehabilitation stations be established by Jan. 1, 1992.

Today, the Santa Cruz County supervisors are expected to adopt a resolution endorsing AB 203, calling it “critically important” that the rescue facilities be opened “at the earliest possible time to be able to respond to the catastrophic effects of a marine oil spill, should one occur.”