

# State calls off city's dog policy

## Lighthouse Field to lose no-leash freedom

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SANTA CRUZ — Dogs will no longer have free run of Its Beach and Lighthouse Field after 12 years of unleashed liberty.

In a letter to the city, the state Department of Parks and Recreation demanded a halt to off-leash hours by Nov. 15, 2007 — the same date the city's contract to manage the sites ends.

The 6th District Court of Appeals ruled in August that the city must

either study environmental impacts of off-leash dogs at the West Cliff Drive sites or revert back to the 1984 general plan for the area, which specifically states, "pets should be restricted to leashes."

The city has managed Lighthouse Field State Beach, which includes both sites, for the state since 1977.

State Parks' decision, as expected,

is meeting mixed reaction.

"I'm actually, you could say, overjoyed at the state's decision," said Grant Weseman, a longtime Santa Cruz resident who is part of Lighthouse Field Beach Rescue, the group that sued the city in 2003 for not studying the impacts of off-leash

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The state has decided that in two years, dogs will no longer be able to run off-leash at Its Beach and Lighthouse Field.

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## Leashes

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dogs. "I'm looking at it as a legacy for our children. That area was never intended to be a dog park."

The state's letter, written Oct. 26 by the department's newly appointed attorney Bradley Torgan, noted statewide policy says "any animal brought into a state park must be under the immediate control of the visitor or shall be confined."

While the state had supported Santa Cruz's decision in 1993 to allow dogs to run around without leashes before 10 a.m. and after 4 p.m., the appeals court decision changed the state's thinking.

"The city's 1984 general plan is a binding document," said Sheryl Tankersley, State Parks spokeswoman. "That's what we have to go with right now."

City attorney John Barisone said there's almost no chance the city will pay for an environmental review of off-leash dogs in the area, a report that has been estimated to cost around \$100,000.

Instead, officials will look at other areas in the city where it might make sense to allow dogs off-leash, though "nothing jumps to mind," said Dannettee Shoemaker, city Parks and Recreation director.

Shoemaker said she'll work to find alternative off-leash sites



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Donder and Iggy take their owners Carolyn Rudesill and Donna Lee for a leashless walk in Lighthouse Field on Wednesday.

and present them to the Parks and Recreation Commission in February or March.

Ultimately, it's up to the City Council to approve any proposal that allows dog off leash.

Shoemaker said she has received at least 60 e-mails from dog owners upset about the state's reversal.

About 50 people, including Westside resident Kristi Bittner, showed up at Monday's Parks and Recreation Commission meeting.

All but one person expressed grief about the state's decision and asked city officials to find a solution, commissioner Kris Reyes said.

"It's extremely unfair to do

this," said Bittner, who takes Kate, her part-terrier, part-Australian cattle dog to the beach regularly. "We think there's no reason this area can't be shared."

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