

Big Basin may get reprieve

BIG BASIN

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SANTA CRUZ — Big Basin State Park will probably operate at less than full capacity this summer, but it is unlikely that the park will be forced to shut altogether, according to park officials.

Angered by a long history of sewage spills from the park's aging sewage-treatment plant, the state Regional Water Quality Control Board gave park officials an ultimatum in October: fix the system by June 30 or face possible closure and a \$600,000 fine.

Park officials say they cannot complete the \$1.5-million repair by the deadline, but their fast response to the crisis has impressed state water officials, who will decide Friday whether to extend the deadline. Water Quality Control Board staff members say park management "has been expending a substantial amount of effort to comply with the Board's order," and has recommended the park's deadline be extended to Oct. 31.

The board's meeting will be at 9 a.m. Friday at Seaside City Council Chambers, 440 Harcourt Ave. in Seaside.

Consultants studying the park's sewage problem have recommended improvements such as installing small septic systems to serve the park's permanent residences and reducing the treatment plant's workload, and replacing all taps, shower heads and toilets with water-saving varieties.

Many old sewer lines must be replaced and manholes raised to six inches above ground to prevent rainwater from infiltrating, and expensive repairs are needed on the treatment plant itself. The highly-treated wastewater is discharged into Waddell Creek, where it supplies most of the water flow during the summer months.

Park Superintendent Bud Getty said, "We've managed to move amazingly fast for a state department. They know we're trying."

Since October the park has been

forced to keep its wastewater discharge down to 15,000 gallons a day — about half its normal flow. The park is allowing campers on a first-come, first-served basis, and is operating at about two-thirds capacity, Getty said, which hasn't been much of an inconvenience during the winter off-season.

But springtime camping crowds are coming.

Bill Gutzwiller, a Boulder Creek merchant and organizer of the environmental group Friends of Big Basin, says current park officials are making admirable efforts to correct the problems. But he noted that the park has a long history of dumping raw sewage into Waddell Creek.

"For 50 years the biggest polluter in the Waddell basin has been the state of California," he said. "That's a horrendous breach of trust. The citizens shouldn't have to beat them about the head and shoulders and say, 'You should do yur job.' Big Basin is the crown jewel of the state park system."