

Trespassers threaten Bonny Doon Eco Reserve

Martin Fire has done little to discourage
visitors from prohibited areas



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Plants, like this fern, are growing out of the ashes along Martin Road in the Bonny Doon Ecological Reserve.

Bonny Doon

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✓ **By LISA HIRSCHMANN**
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BONNY DOON — State Fish and Game officials and area residents say trespassing at the Bonny Doon Ecological Reserve, where part of the 520-acre Martin Fire raged in June, continues to be a serious problem despite its 90-day closure.

The number of trespassers on the reserve since the Martin Fire, which officials say was human-caused, is "probably about the same" as it was prior to the fire, according to game warden Steve Schindler of Fish and Game.

"A lot of people know it's closed but they want to go up and look at

the fire damage," Schindler said. "It's kinda that attractive nuisance thing."

Fish and Game has issued 10 citations to trespassers on the reserve since the Martin Fire, according to Schindler. The 90-closure began June 18.

Though trespassing on the reserve was a problem long before the fire, Fish and Game officials say it is even more important to keep trespassers out in the wake of the fire due to dangerous conditions and to facilitate plant regeneration.

The reserve was home to two rare herbaceous plant species, the Santa Cruz wallflower and the Ben Lomond spineflower, as well as

several endangered plant species including the Santa Cruz cypress, the Bonny Doon manzanita and the Santa Cruz manzanita. Restoration ecologists will not know for sure if those species survived the fire until spring, according to Val Haley, a botanist who is the docent and volunteers coordinator at the reserve. In the meantime, they say, it is imperative trespassers are kept off the property.

"There was so much ash on the ground that it was impossible to see the trails," said Laurie Briden, Fish and Game's senior wildlife biologist for the bay delta region. "The concern was that with some

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VAL HALEY, BOTANIST

Reserve

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trails being covered, plants would be stepped on."

Reserve conditions also pose a human safety risk, according to Haley.

"It's basically hazardous conditions in there. There's a lot of dead standing trees that can fall over, and it's also very vulnerable to erosion at this point," she said.

Nearby residents have nonetheless witnessed trespassing on the reserve on many occasions, and have even confronted some of the trespassers. Pat Morrison and Miriam Beames were walking on Martin Road when they confronted four young men on small motorbikes and one female passenger entering the reserve.

"One of them says, 'Lady, you know, I've been going in here for 50 years,'" Beames said. "They were, you know, 'Here's this old lady, come on, get off my back.'"

Some residents have reported trespassers to Fish and Game or the Sheriff's Office, but enforcement has been limited, they say.

"I also called the Sheriff's Office, and if they have nothing else to do, which can be the case, they'll come up," Beames said.

"Due to response times, it's hit or miss," he said. "I try to get up there as often as I can, but with other things going on..."

There is only one Fish and



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Flora in the Bonny Doon Ecological Reserve has begun to regenerate just weeks after the Martin Fire.

Game warden assigned specifically to patrol Santa Cruz County's inland areas, though there are three other officials that are able to do so if necessary, according to Schindler.

The California Department of Fish and Game classifies trespassing on the reserve as an infraction, punishable by a minimum fine of \$380, including the county penalty assessment. Officials can cite trespassers for a misdemeanor if they

are on motorbikes or caught starting a campfire or using fireworks in the reserve. A misdemeanor is punishable with a maximum fine of \$1,000 and/or six months in jail. Despite trespassers, plants like the bracken fern already have sprung up in the reserve. Some oak tree stumps are also sprouting and manzanita plants are reappearing at their bases, according to Haley.

Though the current 90-day

closure will conclude in September, Briden intends to recommend at that point that the reserve remain closed for an entire year.

"I would like to see it closed until we get some good rains in so the trails are really identifiable and we can see what's really coming in," she said.

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