

New dog leash warnings divide residents



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Jana, a dog legally on-leash at Beer Can Beach in Rio del Mar, pays no mind as county Animal Shelter officer George DeLeon chats with the dog's human companion on Wednesday.

Animal Shelter officers step up patrols at county beaches, parks

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LIVE OAK — What was once a walk on the beach with a frolicking dog in Live Oak can now get you collared — and people are barking about it.

Since Santa Cruz County Animal Shelter officers increased enforcement of off-leash dog laws in January at unincorporated county beaches and parks, residents have been divided about whether the warnings and citations have gone too far or not far enough.

Off-leash dogs are not allowed at popular spots such as 20th Avenue Beach and Anna Jean Cummings Park.

"The community is upset," said Todd Stosuy, field services manager for the county Animal Shelter.

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COUNTY DOG LICENSES

WHAT: Licenses are required for dogs to ensure they are vaccinated, help reunite them with their owners if lost and facilitate dog-bite investigations.

WHERE: Dog licenses can be purchased for \$28 at Santa Cruz County Animal Shelters at 2200 Seventh Ave. in Live Oak or 580 Airport Blvd. in Watsonville or online at www.scanimalshelter.org/purchase_license.

DETAILS: Call 454-7303 or log on to www.scanimalshelter.org.



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Animal Shelter officer George DeLeon writes up a warning for Mark Ruggieri, who was throwing a ball with an unleashed Uma, a friend's dog Ruggieri often takes for a romp at Beer Can Beach.

CITATIONS/WARNINGS ISSUED

From Jan. 20 to Feb. 16, Animal Services enforced dog laws here:

LIVE OAK BEACHES: 10 patrols, 84 contacts, 10 warnings, five citations for no license or lack of spay/neuter without a license, one citation for off-leash dog in traffic on East Cliff Drive

BROMMER STREET PARK, LIVE OAK: 13 patrols, six contacts, one license sale

HIGHLANDS PARK, BEN LOMOND: Seven patrols, one contact

SEASCAPE PARK, APTOS: Five patrols, four contacts, three citations for no license or spay/neuter

ANNA JEAN CUMMINGS PARK, SOQUEL: 17 patrols, 18 contacts, three citations

JOSE AVENUE PARK, LIVE OAK: 10 patrols, no contacts

APTOS POLO GROUNDS (OUTSIDE DOG PARK): 10 patrols, seven contacts

BEER CAN BEACH, RIO DEL MAR: Two patrols, one warning

SOURCE: Santa Cruz County Animal Shelter



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL

Animal Shelter officer George DeLeon returns to his vehicle after patrolling on foot at Beer Can Beach in Rio del Mar on Wednesday.

DOGS

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"A large majority of people that we're running into are upset that these laws are being enforced after years of them not being enforced," Stosuy said. "On the other side of the issue are the folks who have been annoyed with dogs off-leash for years. They're happy that we're doing it. It's a very contentious issue."

County officials said the enforcement came in part as a response to complaints. The aim is to make the beaches

and parks safer for people, other dogs and wildlife such as birds, sea lions and possum that have been harassed, Stosuy said.

The new enforcement is separate from state-run beaches such as Its Beach or city facilities.

This week, officers also began to patrol Rio del Mar's Beer Can Beach at the end of Clubhouse Drive — but stopped after two days when they realized much of the area is private property.

A resident, Marcus Caudill, retrieved county maps this week and pointed out to county Animal Shelter officials that the beach is nearly all private property from Via Gaviota in Rio del Mar to La Selva Beach.

"We were originally under the impression that it was a public beach," said Stosuy. Officers gave one warning and no one was cited, he said.

Stosuy suggested dog owners might try a new off-leash dog area that opened this week at Chanticleer Avenue Park on the 1900 block of Chanticleer.

Elsewhere, county officers said they would chiefly warn people about the rules until March then issue more tickets. From Jan. 20 to this week, officers said they had talked to more than 120 dog owners about the rules and cited eight people for having off-leash dogs or not having a

dog license.

Officers also are checking whether dogs are spayed or neutered unless the owner has a special license to keep the dog intact.

Most of the owners contacted on Live Oak beaches have had licenses, Stosuy said, which can now be bought online at www.scanimalshelter.org. Since shelter officers publicized their new enforcement Jan. 25, the shelter has issued about 675 licenses, 87 fewer than last year at this time. There are about 8,500 active dog licenses in the county.

BARKING MAD

Back at the beach, not everyone likes the new enforcement.

On Feb. 11, more than 30 dog owners gathered their off-leash dogs at the beach at 20th Avenue for "Occupy Dog Beach" or "Dogccupy." They gathered signatures on a petition — now more than 600 — to allow dogs off-leash from 4 p.m. to 10 a.m. They plan to present the petition to the county Board of Supervisors, asking for some off-leash hours to be permitted.

Stosuy said Animal Shelter officers did not give tickets at the event because they considered it a peaceful demonstration.

He said having off-leash hours would make patrols more feasible.

Georgina Monahan, who lives near 20th Avenue beach, said the patrols have not gone far enough. As soon as the officers leave the beach, she said, dog owners unfasten the leashes.

"The shorebirds are gone and children can't play without having groups of dogs race around them, jump on them or urinate on their sand castles," according to Monahan.

Monahan and her grandchildren, ages 3 and 11, have avoided the beach for more than a year because dogs "were dominating the beach," she said. She disagreed with the proposal for off-leash dog hours.

"There are an awful lot of people like myself who are relieved" with the new patrols, Monahan said.

County Board of Supervisors President John Leopold said more than 40 constituents had talked to him about the new enforcement in recent weeks. Many were dog owners who wanted a more liberal policy.

Leopold said, "We're not going to make a change quickly because there are good arguments on all sides of this. To make a good policy, it would come up through our Animal Shelter officials then to our county Parks Commission. That process will take time."

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