

# Animal Shelters Animal rescue center may be resuscitated with state funding

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SANTA CRUZ — The future is looking brighter for a longtime animal rescue group that closed its doors this summer.

■ *Toxins  
threaten  
harbor  
seals — A4*

■ *Virus  
found in  
Pacific  
dolphin — A4*

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Gov. Pete Wilson signed a bill that provides funds for six wildlife rehabilitation centers to be established along California's coast.

The state Department of Fish & Game will negotiate with Native Animal Rescue to operate one of the centers in Santa Cruz.

"It's a great step in the right direction," said Cliff Feldman, acting board president of Native Animal Rescue.

The group ended 15 years of nursing sick and injured animals in August after an unprecedented number of dying sea birds from Monterey Bay overwhelmed the clinic.

Directors said the \$50,000 budget was a fraction of what the agency needed, and the tiny room used for

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## Animal rescue center

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the wildlife next to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals shelter was too stressful for them and the wild animals.

Assembly Bill 1549 co-authored by Sen. Henry Mello, D-Watsonville, will provide \$1.3 million a year for wildlife rehabilitation centers. The money will come from interest on a fund created by a one-time 1991 tax on oil brought into the state by tanker or pipeline.

According to Mello, the interest will be raised over the next three years and will be available in 1998.

It gives the local Native Animal Rescue a "window of opportunity," said Feldman.

"It means for the first time potentially, and I underscore that word, we have government funding that will allow us to not only create a new facility but operate it with normal and decent wages," he said.

Feldman said he believes a local center could receive \$200,000 a year for three years. The bill also requires establishing rescue centers in Los Angeles

Harbor, San Francisco Bay, San Diego, Humboldt County and the Santa Barbara area.

In the meantime, Native Animal Rescue is re-establishing a board of directors to replace the one that disbanded when the center closed. So far, the new board has 11 members, including returning directors Feldman and Lana Pieri.

The board is working to establish a center before 1998, when funds from AB 1549 become available. It is negotiating with Santa Cruz County officials to use The Farm in Soquel as a temporary site.

"My sense is we will be able to help in that regard — a temporary location," said county Supervisor Fred Keeley.

Native Animal Rescue will soon launch a fund-raising effort and is seeking donations, Feldman said.

*The Native Animal Rescue board will meet at 6:30 p.m. Thursday in Room B-1 of Dominican Hospital's Education Center. For more information, individuals may call Cliff Feldman at 425-8989.*