

# Environment Illegal dump threatens preserve

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SANTA CRUZ — An illegal dump on a North Coast brussels sprout farm may be leaching trash and toxins into a lagoon at Wilder Ranch State Park, polluting a nature preserve.

The dump, which rangers said has been used for as long as 20 years, spills into a creek that feeds the lagoon after rains. The rat-infested debris, 15 feet deep in places, contains household trash, feces, discarded oil products, engine parts, pesticides and farm materials.

"They are dumping it right on the border of the nature preserve and it is all falling down into the creek," said State Parks Ranger Eric Bloom, who reported the site. "It is a very sensitive environ-

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Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

State Parks Ranger Eric Bloom inspects part of the site used as a dump.

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mental area."

Just downstream from the dump, egrets, eagles and herons can be seen in the lagoon waters. The area is also home to 44 nesting pairs of the northern snowy plover, Bloom said, a federally listed endangered species.

The two farmers who lease the land, Julio Rinaldi and George Rovetti, both of Santa Cruz, could face prosecution on water pollution and unlawful business practices charges, according to the District Attorney's Office. They were not at home to answer telephone calls Thursday. The land is owned by Pacific Trust Co. of Santa Cruz and Helen Goode Younger of Bakersfield, investigators said.

A complaint against the farmers has been forwarded to the District Attorney's Office by the parks department, and is under review. Morgan Taylor, a deputy district attorney who prosecutes environmental cases, said the farmers could face fines of up to \$25,000 for the water pollution, and up to \$2,500 a day on the business practices charge.

"There are all kinds of penalties we could be looking at, but it's awfully early to tell yet," Taylor said. "In this case it is alleged there are some

hazardous materials (involved)."

The dump is one of at least three in use on the property along Willow Creek, which runs into the lagoon from the south side of Wilder Ranch. The areas are littered with feces and tissue rangers said had been left by farmworkers.

Bloom said he discovered the largest dump while walking along the creek, and began to monitor it.

"I'd find large piles of garbage — 20 to 30 trash bags," Bloom said. "The next day a bulldozer would come and push it over the side, and push some dirt on top."

A 50-square-foot pile of trash, which included mattresses, bicycles, appliances, hypodermic needles and Christmas trees, appeared recently dumped. Remnants of food had hardly spoiled.

In addition to the dump sites, rangers said they found leaking diesel fuel tanks fouling the ground near the creek, and said horse manure from a boarding stable along the creek may also be causing problems.

Investigators are waiting for test results to help them determine polluted.

The cleanup of the dump probably will be charged to the farmers and performed under government supervision, Taylor said.

"This is one of the last stretches of beach in Santa Cruz County where snowy plovers can nest in peace," Bloom said looking over the beach from a dump site. "This stuff is just dumped into the creek."