

MOVE OVER, ROVER



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

A chocolate Lab named Bo enjoys a scratch on the head Sunday from Kaylee Craft at Four Mile Beach.

Endangered Species Plover protection effort could limit dog, fire activity along county, state coast

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Rover could be banished from Four Mile Beach and other state beaches in Santa Cruz County in an effort to protect the federally threatened snowy plover.

SANTA CRUZ Over the next month, the Santa Cruz District of state parks will be looking at ways to protect the coastal bird.

Access could be restricted at beaches up and down California, with such activities as kite-flying, hang-gliding and camping prohibited in nesting areas.

But mostly the rules will limit fires and dogs.

In Santa Cruz, state parks biologists and representatives from U.S. Fish and Wildlife, the state Coastal Commission and the Point Reyes Bird Observatory will be documenting nesting sites.

"We're going to be doing an assessment beach by beach," said Dave Vincent, superintendent of the Santa Cruz District.

Snowy plovers are known to nest at Wad-

dell Creek, Wilder Ranch, Manresa, Sunset and near the mouth of the Pajaro River.

After assessing beach sites, the district will decide what steps are needed to give the birds greater protection. These steps likely won't take access to beaches away, but could restrict where dogs can walk and where fire rings are located.

The state could place temporary fencing or rope to keep people away from plover sites, a measure already taken in some cases.

Most fire rings are not located on beach where nesting sites are likely, Vincent said. The reduction or redistribution of those rings is still an ongoing financial concern the district is seeking to remedy, though.

As for dogs, they are prohibited on state beaches unless a particular area is authorized for them. In the case of Santa Cruz County state beaches, dogs are allowed at parts of Manresa State Beach, and on Four and Three Mile beaches, which are part of Wilder Ranch.

By Aug. 1, the state will be taking a zero-tolerance approach to rule-breakers near

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snowy plover sites, and people walking dogs in areas where they aren't allowed will be cited.

In the Monterey County District of state parks, enforcement of fire and dog regulations will be stepped up at Zmudowski, Moss Landing, Salinas River and Marina beaches, as well as portions of Monterey State Beach, according to that county's state park superintendent, Phil Jenkins, last week.

State officials say in the next month they will conduct a public education campaign informing visitors about steps taken to protect the birds.

State parks land is crucial to protecting the bird, as the department oversees 280 miles of state coastline.

Snowy plovers nest on beaches about the same time that millions of visitors flock to the coast — from early spring to mid-

autumn. The sparrow-sized, pale-colored bird breeds from southern Washington to southern Baja California, Mexico.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services has determined the birds breed in 62 locations in California, with 44 of those areas containing some state park property.

Santa Cruz County has taken steps the past several years to protect snowy plover habitat. Scott Creek Beach underwent a project to refurbish its dunes and replant native vegetation with the birds in mind. Earlier this month, a temporary fence that has since been removed was placed at the county-operated Corcoran Lagoon beach to protect a nesting pair of plovers. That was a rarity, as most plovers are found in less-urban beach settings.

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