

City pursuing pelican-protection plan

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When the California brown pelicans and anglers begin competing for anchovies and sardines at the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf next fall, the city will have a new plan to protect the birds.

SANTA CRUZ

On the heels of an autumn that saw unprecedented numbers of birds injured off the wharf, the Santa Cruz City Council took the first step of a pelican protection plan Tuesday night. In a 7-0 vote, council members gave preliminary approval to a law that will enable the city to close the pier to fishing as needed to protect the birds.

But the plan stresses education and includes trained volunteers, who will walk the pier to inform fishermen about how fishing gear can harm the state and federally endangered birds.

What was left for later is a decision on spending \$17,500 for signs that detail the dangers of birds getting snared by lines and explain how to respond should that occur and \$1,000 for new trash lids and rescue equipment to be stored at the wharf.

Council members said they supported posting the signs, but wanted to wait until after the mid-year review of the city's budget before committing the funds.

Parks director Jim Lang said most of the birds were entangled by accident and that educating the public about the problem was key to combating it.

Pelican conservationists were obviously pleased with

the action.

"This program is needed up and down the coast," said Jack Ellwanger of the Pelican Network. "Santa Cruz stepped forward."

Council members emphasized they were not wholly closing the pier to fishing, though that could happen temporarily during times when pelican activity is high.

Still, some fishermen said they were concerned about being able to continue fishing there.

"I'm looking forward to seeing how it's handled," said David Maruska of Santa Cruz.

Last fall, some 162 birds were rescued and sent to the International Bird Center and about 40 of those died, said center spokeswoman Karen Benzel. She said it cost the center about \$200 per bird to rehabilitate them.

Supporters said hundreds more tangled birds could not be rescued from the water.

Each fall sees an influx of anchovies and sardines off the wharf. That lures fishermen who like to catch the tiny fish for bait and brown pelicans that like to dine on them.

The hooks alone are dangerous, but so are the fishing lines. When the birds get entangled, a frustrated angler may just cut the line. The bird flies off with it still attached and it can get tangled again somewhere else.

Last fall's influx of small fish was exceptional, Lang said.

"I've been here 20 years and have never seen anything like it before," Land said.

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