

CARLSBAD: City hires wildland area management company

Patrols of Lake Calavera area to begin next week

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Joanna Munday finds a good rock for her son, Jack, 4, to throw into Lake Calavera in Carlsbad on Friday afternoon. The City of Carlsbad has just hired the Center for Natural Lands Management to manage the lake and other native habitat areas in town.

(Photo by Jamie Scott Lytle - staff photographer)

CARLSBAD -- A company that manages native habitat areas across the state expects to begin patrolling Carlsbad's Lake Calavera next week, looking for people who are dumping trash or riding dirt bikes.

"We're ready to go and very excited," said Markus Spiegelberg, San Diego region manager for the Center for Natural Lands Management.

Carlsbad's City Council agreed to a three-year contract with the Fallbrook-based company in December, giving it management control over some 600 acres of city-owned native habitat.

"They have a proven track record of very successful preserve management throughout California," city employee Mike Grim told the council before its unanimous vote Dec. 16.

The center already cares for 1,700 acres of privately owned native habitat in Carlsbad, including land around Carlsbad Oaks, Robertson Ranch, Calavera Hills and the Villages of La Costa, Spiegelberg said.

Statewide, it manages more than 50,000 acres, its Web site notes.

Under its new contract with Carlsbad, the center will care for 13 city-owned properties. The largest among them are the Lake Calavera region in northeastern Carlsbad and the native habitat land at the city's municipal golf course along Palomar Airport Road.

Much of the initial work will probably focus on the Lake Calavera area, city and company employees said. That region has a history of illegal dumping and motorbike riding, and many unofficial trails are in use there.

Another company is doing habitat restoration at the golf course, so that area won't be needing a great deal of the center's time initially, Spiegelberg said.

Carlsbad plans to pay the center \$344,000 during the first year of the management contract -- that's when most of the work is planned, Grim said. The second and third years are estimated to each cost \$170,000.

"The reason the first year is so high is it involves a very aggressive (invasive) species removal program," Grim said, mentioning razor-sharp pampas grass as one targeted plant on the removal list.

Also planned during the center's first management year are "baseline" environmental studies to assess the condition of the natural areas, he said.

Spiegelberg said the city of Carlsbad is going to benefit because the company already manages so much property in the area. With the addition of the 600 acres, the center will have enough work to keep two preserve managers and nearly a full-time ranger busy, he said.

Local environmental leaders said during last month's council meeting that they're pleased the center has the job, but wish the contract had been handed out years ago.

Diane Nygaard of the Preserve Calavera group noted that it has been three years since the city approved its habitat management plan, which details what natural areas Carlsbad will set aside for preservation and how that land will be managed.

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