

DOGS NOW PROHIBITED ON FOUR HIKING TRAILS

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Avid hikers who have dogs will no longer be allowed to exercise with their four-legged friends on four Palm Springs trails.

Over the weekend, the city installed signs at local trailheads advising hikers dogs aren't allowed due to an effort to protect Peninsular bighorn sheep, which experts say perceive dogs as predators and stress-inducers.

Dogs are now prohibited all year on the Museum Trail, South Lykken Trail, North Lykken Trail and Araby Trail. City staff will warn and educate first-time violators, but anyone caught a second time could face fines of up to \$500, Assistant City Manager Marcus Fuller said.

The prohibition is likely to upset some hikers in Palm Springs, which has a reputation for being a dogfriendly community. But the effort is related to stipulations in the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan, which means dogs should have been prevented from using trails years ago.

Approved in 2008, the plan is designed to conserve 240,000 acres — about one-fifth of the Coachella Valley — and protect 27 plants and animals. Among them are the fringe-toed lizard, desert tortoise and Peninsular bighorn sheep.

Officials have so far secured about 95,000 acres that will stay undeveloped. Properties are scattered across the region, mostly in the undeveloped area north of Interstate 10.

Fuller said the restriction is only briefly mentioned in the conservation plan's environmental impact report and "was not highlighted to us until recently by residents that encouraged the city to have regulations of its public trails be consistent with the CVMSHCP, particularly in areas where the bighorn sheep would frequent."

Peter Tira, a spokesman for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, said local efforts are unique on a statewide level since most bighorn sheep across the state "live in remote areas where there aren't people around."

Experts say dogs may force bighorn sheep to flee from their homes even if the creatures are separated by a significant distance.

Furthermore, the mortality rate of lambs increases since they shouldn't be moving around as much and entering dangerous territory.

Approximately 800 bighorn sheep live in area mountains.

Jim DeForge, executive director of the Bighorn Institute in Palm Desert, said other cities have taken similar steps to protect bighorn sheep near their trails and Palm Springs was supposed to follow suit under the conservation plan.

"They signed this off years ago and never dealt with it like Palm Desert, Rancho Mirage and the rest of the cities," DeForge said.

In response to the conservation plan, dogs aren't allowed on Palm Desert trails except for a 2-mile loop comprised of portions of the Homestead, Hopalong Cassidy and Gabby Hayes trails, city spokesman David Hermann said. It's accessible from Cahuilla Hills Park.

Rancho Mirage's website indicates leashed dogs are allowed on its trails, including the Big Horn Overlook, Jack Rabbit, Chuckwalla and Roadrunner trails off Highway 111.

Leashed dogs are allowed on trails within La Quinta's jurisdiction, said Kevin Meredith, animal control and code compliance supervisor. These are mostly in the La Quinta Cove neighborhood near Calle Tecate.

Dogs are not allowed on trails that are in Bureau of Land Management property. These include the Bear Creek, Boo Hoff and Cove to Lake trails.

"That's been for as long as I know," Meredith said.

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