

Goose-control plan in place at Deception Pass State Park

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - Washington State Parks has begun work on a goose-control plan to protect public and environmental health at Cranberry Lake in Deception Pass State Park on Whidbey Island.

Cranberry Lake swim area currently fails to meet public health swim beach safety standards because of goose feces, which contain disease-causing organisms, including Salmonella, Giardia and Cryptosporidium. People can be exposed to these organisms in the water and on the beach. Canada Geese also are known to host the parasite that causes "swimmer's itch."

Goose control measures in the park are planned at Cranberry Lake and at the Cornet Bay Retreat Center, areas of high potential for public contact with goose feces. Other bodies of water in Deception Pass State Park will remain as habitat for geese.

Deception Pass State Park staff hosted a public meeting recently to inform the community about the integrated plan, the same prescription currently used by other public recreation agencies in Washington. State Parks is working in cooperation with several agencies, including the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Whidbey Island Naval Air Station and Island County Public Health.

The first phase of the goose-control plan, currently under way, involves non-lethal methods such as hazing by dogs, shoreline fencing, coyote cutouts and spraying lawns with a sour-tasting extract. If these approaches do not work, a second phase would include a roundup of geese by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for euthanasia during the warm season.

Canada Geese are a non-native species in the Puget Sound area. Historically, geese would migrate through the area, however, over time they have become residential non-migratory, due to favorable conditions created by landscaping and lawns. During the past few years, growing numbers of the geese have been living along the shores of the lake.

In addition to the public health concerns at the swim beach, the geese feces are creating conditions that pose risk to the ecology of Cranberry Lake longer term. The feces enrich the water with phosphates, nitrates and organic nutrients that promote an abundant growth of algae. As the algae dies and decays, it depletes the dissolved oxygen supply needed by other aquatic life, resulting in a lake with recurrent fish kills and blue-green algae blooms, or cyano-bacteria, some of which produce toxins or poisons that can kill pets, waterfowl and other animals, in addition to causing severe human illness.

Large numbers of geese in the area also pose risk to aircraft at the naval base on the island.

The Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission manages a diverse system of more than 100 state parks and recreation programs, including long-distance trails, boating safety and winter recreation. Washington State Parks will turn 100 years old on March 19, 2013, and will celebrate with events in parks all over the state, all year long. For more information, visit www.parks.wa.gov/events/.

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