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## Crowds mean trashed area beaches

Officials look at potential solutions

By Carina Woudenberg Sep 13, 2017

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This reader submission shows the way local beach visitors leave their trash everywhere, particularly on a busy weekend day.

Labor Day weekend brought the heat, it brought the crowds and, for many of the Coastside's beaches, it also brought the trash. A lot of it.

State Parks Superintendent Terry Kiser says it was one of the busiest weekends on record, and it produced 300 cubic yards of garbage over the state-managed Santa Cruz and San Mateo county beaches. It's an area that already overwhelms limited maintenance staff.

"Looking at our staffing levels, they've been low for a long time," Kiser said.

The maintenance crew is made up of six or seven employees who are responsible for servicing 13 "park units" over a stretch of 45 miles. It extends from Waddell Beach on the south end up to Gray Whale Cove.

In addition to the increased trash and need for bathroom maintenance that comes with more people, the added traffic also makes it difficult for the limited staff to journey from one location to another to do the job.

County-owned beaches are also dealing with trash, but Sarah Birkeland, acting director of San Mateo County Parks, says she thinks the issues there are not quite as bad as they are at state beaches. The county manages the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve in Moss Beach and the Devil's Slide trail, smaller areas that aren't as prone to the large-scale dumping seen on other beaches, Birkeland said.

"It seems like it's getting worse," Birkeland said. "It's disturbing."

The county is currently in the process of acquiring perhaps the biggest poster child for beach trash in the area: Tunitas Creek Beach. Here Birkeland says county workers have been doing a lot of trash pickup. In addition to food containers, park employees are also finding abandoned picnic sites complete with beach chairs and barbecues.

Kiser has some ideas for solutions too. One priority would be to try to secure more seasonal and permanent maintenance staff, which has been a challenge.

"Wages are not great," Kiser said of the staffing positions. "It's hard to recruit and it's even harder to maintain."

Kiser noted that another possibility could lie in recruiting more volunteers. He noted that a community group in Montara has proved to be a valuable asset toward the effort and more volunteers could likely improve the situation.

A third idea involves placing more garbage bins. Kiser noted that State Parks is currently looking into a new garbage contract that could result in the strategic placement of more garbage bins.

The city of Half Moon Bay is operating under similar financial constraints with Poplar Beach. The city recently put in new trash cans in the parking lot there, but is currently re-evaluating that placement.

“It seems like even the new trash containers are not sufficient,” said Half Moon Bay Mayor Debbie Ruddock.

Ruddock added that the city plans to put in larger bins as well as a trash compactor there in conjunction with the new waste hauling agreement with Allied Waste.

The city is in the process of looking at a variety of remedies for the trash situation, Ruddock said, including potentially tapping the general fund money to fund a group similar to the Pacifica Beach Coalition up north.

Ruddock added that the city would also like to look into bringing back a recycling center behind Safeway and getting the homeless population involved in some upkeep programs.

Ruddock added that she would also be interested in seeing an advisory committee form around the issue.

“It’s definitely on our radar and we will be bringing it back to the council for discussion,” Ruddock said.