

Lions visit, kitten goes home, rocks scrubbed



It's been a week of unique images, including (clockwise, from top left) three lions captured on video during an overnight visit to Point Lobos (story below), the reunion of the kitten whose paws were burned in the Carmel Valley fire being reunited with his family (see page 3A), and volunteers busily scrubbing away at some of Big Sur's boulders (see page 11A.)

PHOTOS/COURTESY LAURA FRANKLIN, SPCA, AUSTIN KEEGAN

Desal plan abruptly withdrawn; Cal Am says it will 'reengage'

By KELLY NIX

IN A surprising move Wednesday afternoon, California American Water withdrew its application to the California Coastal Commission to build a desalination plant in Marina — a day before commissioners were to make a decision on the desal plant's permit.

Cal Am proposed the desal plant more than 20 years ago after the State Water Resources Control Board ordered the company in 1995 to come up with an alternative source to the overdrafted Carmel River.

The California Public Utilities Commission and the SWRCB have already OK'd the desal plant, but the coastal commission's staff, after many of years of advocating for desal as a solution to the Monterey Peninsula's water woes, announced they were against it.

Realizing it could get a "no" vote from the coastal commission, Cal Am said in a news release late Wednesday it was withdrawing its permit application and plans to "reengage Marina stakeholders on issues of social and environmental

justice." The six wells Cal Am would use for the project would be on sand dunes along the Marina shoreline, though the treatment facility would be inland.

'In best interest'

Marina, which wouldn't get any water from the desal plant, has long sought to stop Cal Am from building wells in its sand dunes, arguing they would damage its water supply, and the coastal commission's staff pointed to the project's "substantial" environmental impacts as a reason to reject it.

Cal Am President Rich Svindland said many factors contributed to the company's decision and that withdrawing and refileing the application later is "in the best interest of our customers" because it increases the likelihood that the company will eventually get the permits to build the desal project.

"We will keep the state water board informed of these events and believe this decision supports our intent to decrease pumping on the river as quickly as pos-

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POINT LOBOS CENSUS FINDS NOT ONE LION, BUT THREE

By CHRIS COUNTS

LIKE A good census-taker, Point Lobos intern researcher Laura Franklin wanted her summer survey of the reserve's large land animals to be inclusive, so she set up wildlife cameras in dozens of remote locations. But it wasn't until she was close to wrapping up her project Aug. 30 that she finally caught a photograph of the reserve's most elusive land mammal, a mountain lion. And when she took a closer look at the image, she was surprised to discover an additional two pairs of lion eyes trailing behind it.

"We are all very excited," Franklin told The Pine Cone. "My guess is we have a mom and her two cubs. At this point, they are old enough to venture out with mom and learn how to hunt. Cubs will usually stay with their moms until they're about 2 years old."

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Shutdown continues as coronavirus cases surge

■ Hospitalizations down, though

By KELLY NIX

ALTHOUGH MONTEREY County seemed to be headed in the right direction last week with fewer coronavirus infections, this week took a turn for the worse.

From Sept. 7 to 11, the county had cases ranging from a high of 59 to a low of 23. That changed Sept. 12, when the county reported 143 new cases, the highest of the month. Though there was a low of only 19 cases Monday, that figure increased to 78 Tuesday, 108 Wednesday and 140 Thursday.

Nowhere near reopening

It's not clear what caused the spike, but Labor Day crowds could have helped spread the virus. On the Peninsula, there were only three reported cases — two in Seaside and one in Marina — out of Thursday's 140.

The new numbers won't help Monterey County advance to the next tier of reopening, which requires the county to

have a seven-day average of no more than 7.0 cases per 100,000 people, and to keep it there three straight weeks. While Monterey County's seven-day average per 100,000 people had been about 11 last week, it's now 18.

The sharp rise in cases came after county health officer Dr. Ed Moreno told the Monterey County Board of Supervisors Tuesday that there was a generally a positive trend in the statistics here.

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Emergency wall repairs at Mission

■ Other major projects on the way

By MARY SCHLEY

WORKERS REMOVED a 30-foot stretch of adobe wall at the Carmel Mission earlier this month after it was found to have deteriorated to the point of being dangerous, according to Stephanie Zelei, executive director of the nonprofit Carmel Mission Foundation, which has raised millions of dollars and overseen many improvements at

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PHOTO/COURTESY STEPHANIE ZELEI

A construction crew removed a deteriorating section of adobe wall at the Carmel Mission after it became a safety hazard, and set up a temporary wall. It will be replaced.

Sampognaro Jr. accused of shooting father to death

By MARY SCHLEY

ONE MEMBER of a local family with an extensive criminal history was killed and another was taken to jail for allegedly shooting him in the head following an argument in a barn on Laureles Grade Saturday morning. Joseph Sampognaro, 32, pleaded not guilty in a Salinas courtroom Wednesday to second-degree murder and numerous other charges, and remained in Monterey County Jail on \$2.2 million bail.

Monterey County Sheriff's Cmdr. Derrel Simpson didn't share details about the case this week, since it's still under investigation, but confirmed that after the shooting, Sampognaro fled in a black Corvette.

'Pin him in'

Deputies responding to the shooting spotted the car, gave chase and eventually captured him after he crashed on Highway 1 in the Highlands.

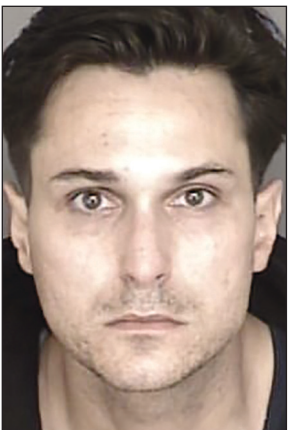
"There was a pursuit, he spun out and

crashed into a sign and tried to drive away," Simpson said. "At that point, the deputies used their vehicles to pin him in to keep him from getting away."

Several locals, including the owner of a Carmel antiques store and the owner of a Carmel Valley restaurant and catering company, reported seeing the chase and its aftermath.

Chip Wittpenn was driving to town from the valley when he saw deputies "flying down C.V. Road," and then saw them chasing the Corvette, and Deborah Wenzler said she saw the Corvette surrounded by the deputies' cars after it had smashed into a fence in the Carmel Highlands. She said she was glad Sampognaro had been caught.

He is being charged with second-degree murder for shooting his 56-year-old father, along with fleeing from cops, evading arrest and being a felon in possession of a firearm. According to the complaint filed this week by the Monterey County District Attorney's



Joseph Sampognaro Jr.

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