

Colwood harmonizes leash laws for lagoon

Amy Dove
News staff

Thou shall not walk dogs off leash. It's already federal law, but the City of Colwood is looking to harmonize regulations at Esquimalt Lagoon, said Coun. Jason Naught.

The lagoon is a federal migratory bird sanctuary and as such it falls under two sets of laws — the federal government's and Colwood's. One says dogs must be on leash within the sanctuary and the other states they must only be under control.

The federal law trumps Colwood bylaws, Naught noted. Although there are currently no signs, dogs are not allowed off leash on either side of Coburg Peninsula. That restriction extends inland 300 feet from high water.

Despite Naught pointing out they were breaking a federal law, dog own-

ers Mayor Jody Twa and Coun. David Saunders voted against the bylaw amendment, saying they saw no reason controlled dogs couldn't be on the ocean side of the spit.

Just who would enforce such a bylaw is also questionable, Twa said, noting there are more dogs than people down there some days. Putting up signs won't do much to stop dogs either, he added.

"A lot of dogs are going to keep going," he said, grinning.

Under federal law, any dog or cat found to be chasing or harming a migratory bird within the sanctuary can be destroyed by a federal game officer.

Colwood takes a less harsh approach and issues pet owners a \$75 fine for allowing their animal to run loose, said bylaw officer Kevin Atkinson, noting he has never seen a federal officer patrolling the lagoon.

It is unlikely more bylaw officers will be hired, said Coun. Cynthia Day. While Atkinson and CRD bylaw officers do patrol the lagoon, the role of the city is education rather than enforcement, she said.

There are opportunities to work with Esquimalt Lagoon Stewardship Initiative volunteers who already have a presence in the area, explained Natalie Bandringa, ELSI co-ordinator. Signs are also being looked at to tell people where the on-leash area is.

"We are not against dogs or dog owners. We are just trying to have the bird sanctuary as a sanctuary," she said.

Ideally, an area outside the sanctuary could be made into an off-leash area similar to the dog run on Dallas Road in Victoria, she added.

Colwood staff are currently working on harmonizing the two bylaws.

reporter@goldstreamgazette.com