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Fireworks to be monitored for ruffled feathers
Wildlife officials will see if nearby pelicans disturbed
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TIKI ISLAND – State wildlife officials will observe tonight whether a fireworks display just offshore of this Galveston County island community wreaks havoc at a nearby nesting site of thousands of endangered brown pelicans.

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Some preservationists fear the privately financed fireworks display's loud booms and bright sprays of pyrotechnic light might disrupt life in the nesting area of the endangered brown pelican on North Deer Island, causing some chicks to starve if their parents are so spooked by the fireworks that they flee the nests and lose track of their offspring.

It is against federal law to harm or harass endangered species.

"But you can't do anything until the disturbance is observed," Houston Audubon Society president Stennie Meadours said. "Parks and Wildlife told us that they would observe the fireworks wherever the display is located to see if there is any disturbance to the birds."

An unidentified Tiki Island homeowner has paid for a July Fourth holiday weekend display for the past three years, said Mayor Charlie Everts, a retired Houston police officer.

The man has had the display set up on a spit of land about 600 yards from North Deer Island, and no one has complained about the event until it was mentioned in a community newsletter this year, he said.

Meetings held

At least one complaint by a Tiki Island resident to the Audubon Society this week raised concerns among bird preservationists that the fireworks would harm the strong recovery of the brown pelican evident along the Texas coast in recent years. The complaint led to meetings among state

and local officials.

Everts said the fireworks do not violate city ordinances because they are set off on land outside the city and the pyrotechnics are legal in unincorporated parts of the county.

On Wednesday, Meadours and representatives of the Texas Department of Fish and Wildlife, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Texas General Land Office boated the North Deer Island area, looking for bits of dry land more distant from the nesting area than the one on which the fireworks have been set off in recent years.

On Thursday, Everts said representatives of all three agencies agreed that the fireworks staging area should be moved to a tiny island a bit farther west of North Deer Island than the normal site. But Everts said state officials will monitor the show despite the compromise on location.

"We think that satisfies everyone involved, and the fireworks will go on, and the residents of Tiki Island will be able to enjoy them, and there won't be any danger to the birds," said Aaron Reed, a spokesman for the state parks and wildlife agency.

Wide range of nesting birds

North Deer Island is a federal bird sanctuary used as a nesting site by an estimated 10,000 to 30,000 pairs of birds of different species annually, according to information on the state fish and wildlife department's Internet site. Roseate spoonbills, reddish egrets and white-faced ibises also nest on the island.

About one-third of the island is made from materials dredged from nearby shipping channels.

"It is the most productive colonial bird nesting site in Galveston Bay, and it's the only place the brown pelicans are nesting this year here," Meadours said.

The island is just south of the Intracoastal Waterway, along which towboats pushing thousands of barges travel each year.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has taken the brown pelican off the

endangered species list along the entire Atlantic coast and the coasts of Florida and Alabama among the Gulf states. The species remains on the endangered list in Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas.

Everts said the man who is paying several thousand dollars for the fireworks display asked not be to identified although he sat in on Thursday's meeting with state officials.

Audubon Society officials and members and representatives for the state agencies said they did not learn the man's name.

"We had a nice meeting, and everybody was after the same goal," Everts said. "I think we got the mission accomplished."

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