

Written by by Luke Harold
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Horse boarding and shows will be suspended at Del Mar Horsepark in 2021, Del Mar Fairgrounds officials announced.

The suspension of horse shows at the horse park allows the board of directors that oversees the state-owned fairgrounds, which owns the park, to evaluate “the necessary investment required to meet water quality requirements for equestrian activities,” according to a news release. The horse park is located next to the San Dieguito River, about two miles east of the fairgrounds.



Fairgrounds staff will attempt to move horse shows to the fairgrounds, where there have been infrastructure upgrades “that can accommodate large-scale equestrian events.”

Those upgrades were part of a recently completed two-year, \$15 million infrastructure project that added a holding pond, a constructed wetlands treatment area and other improvements to the racetrack infield. The fairgrounds has also built a stormwater treatment plant to comply with state and local regulations designed to protect nearby waters.

According to fairgrounds spokeswoman Jennifer Hellman, the horse park has a conditional waiver of waste discharge from animal operations from the Regional Water Quality Control Board. She added that the fair board “needs time to do its due diligence to consider the expenditure required for the upgrades necessary to continue equestrian operations at Horsepark.” The fairgrounds is navigating a precarious financial future due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused the cancellation of the large events that provide most of its revenue.

There are 38 horses boarded at the horse park by three trainers who have monthly stall rentals that expire at the end of 2020, Hellman said. They were given through March 2021 to vacate.

January 2021 - Del Mar Horsepark to Discontinue Shows, Boarding in 2021

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Ellie Hardesty, entering her fourth year as president of the California Dressage Society, said the Del Mar Horsepark “has always been a loyal facility” for the shows her organization has held. Plans for 2021, including lining up judges and sponsorships, were in the works before she learned last week of its closure.

“We would have liked to know that this was actually going to happen and we could have made different arrangements,” said Hardesty, adding that the shows are planned at least six months in advance.

Rancho Santa Fe resident Rochelle Putnam said she has participated in about 50 shows at the horse park over the last 10 years. She said its closure is “going to be a huge gap to fill.”

“I’d have to think that provided significant economic boosts to Del Mar and Solana Beach and everything in terms of hotel stays, restaurants, Mary’s Tack and Feed is right there (across the street from the horse park),” she added. “There are a lot of businesses that really benefited from hosting these big, successful horse shows.”