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City Protests Pollution 'De-listing' for Laguna

By Kia Penso, Sonoma West Times

SEBASTOPOL - The City Council voted on Tuesday, Nov. 15 to send a letter to the State Regional Quality Board, opposing the Board's proposal to de-list the Laguna de Santa Rosa for nitrogen and phosphorous pollution.

The State Board has announced a meeting in Sacramento on Dec. 6 to discuss the de-listing.

Mayor Larry Robinson said the move would take away special status for the Laguna under the Clean Water Act and mean that it would be much more difficult to clean up pollution in the Laguna, because it would no longer qualify for certain types of funding.

Wastewater and animal wastes increase the levels of nitrogen and phosphorous in the water and these chemicals, which are also used in fertilizer, feed the growth of some life forms which then choke out others.

These nutrients, the city believes, are in large part responsible for the Ludwigia and pepperweed infestation that is now so costly to eradicate. Some \$1.5 million in public funds has recently been sent to fight the invading weed which creates unwanted habitat and cover for breeding mosquitoes.

“We are deeply concerned about the infestation of the Laguna de Santa Rosa by exotic plants such as Ludwigia,” the city wrote, “which is multiplying at such a prodigious rate that a very controversial chemical eradication program was initiated recently at a cost of \$1.5 million. There is evidence that these plants provide habitat for mosquitoes, feared to be spreading West Nile Virus, as well as degrading fish habitat.”

The city drafted the letter after Brenda Adelman, chair of the Russian River Watershed Protection Committee, brought it to the attention of the public and the city.

The city also, in its letter, expressed concern at the lack of public process at the local level.

“Why is the only hearing taking place in Sacramento? Elimination of Regional Board hearings in Santa Rosa has in effect deprived many Sonoma County residents of the opportunity to give first hand accounts of the many Laguna problems.”

On the night of the vote, the smell of animal waste hovering over the city dominated any discussion of the weather.

Doug Emery and Eric Johnson recalled going kayaking in one area of the Laguna and having to retreat because of the odor.

“We were paddling in sepsis,” he said.