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Laguna Ludwigia spraying resumes for second year

By Frank Robertson, Sonoma West Times and News

SEBASTOPOL - Herbi-cide spraying resumes in the Laguna de Santa Rosa next week to eradicate the invasive Ludwigia, the aquatic primrose vine that clogs the waterway and promotes the breeding of virus-bearing mosquitoes.

Sebastopol's Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation is preparing for the second season of the Ludwigia Control Project (LCP) to control the invasive aquatic weed that covers significant areas of the Laguna and adjacent flood control channels, said Julian Meisler, restoration project manager for the Laguna Foundation.

The Foundation, the state Department of Fish and Game and the Sonoma County Water Agency last year began a concerted attack on Ludwigia that has taken over portions of the Laguna "to the detriment of native biodiversity, water quality and potential floodwater capacity," said Meisler.

The dense mats also inhibit the ability to control mosquitoes, which may carry West Nile Virus.

The purpose of the three-year project is to control Ludwigia in two of the worst infested areas, one near the intersection of Stony Point Road and Rohnert Park Expressway where Ludwigia grows along roughly 10,000 linear feet of the Laguna channel and the Bellevue Wilfred Flood Control Channel. The area is managed by the Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA).

The second site, located between Occidental Road and Guerneville Road in the California Department of Fish & Game's Laguna Wildlife Area, includes roughly 80 acres of flooded wetlands and 11,500 feet of channel.

The Laguna Foundation initiated the project in 2005 using a combination of a glyphosate-based herbicide followed by mechanical removal of the dead plant material. Over 10 million pounds of Ludwigia and several thousand pounds of garbage were removed from the sites in 2005, said Meisler.

Since the aggressive proliferation of Ludwigia in the Laguna, mosquito populations 100 times greater than normal or considered acceptable have been seen. But after last year's spraying and removal "they saw the numbers plummet," said Meisler.

Although regrowth from 2005 is expected at both sites, it is anticipated significantly less plant material will have to be treated and removed this year, said Meisler.

The Laguna Foundation is proposing to repeat its efforts at both sites, with a start date

next Monday, June 19.

At the Laguna Wildlife Area, a second herbicide, triclopyr, will be applied over a portion of the site and data will be collected to compare its efficacy against glyphosate. Meisler noted that triclopyr has had greater success in controlling *Ludwigia* in other sites in California and Washington and has the advantage of not affecting grasses, sedges and rushes.

“It's important to remember that the three-year plan is designed to address an immediate problem. Over the longer term our goal is to tackle the issues that make the Laguna so attractive to *Ludwigia*,” Meisler said. “This will take time but we have a lot of good minds working on it. I'm confident that we can solve this problem but we can't do it overnight. Restoration throughout the Laguna will be key to success.”

The North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board is considering to cover this year's activities under the Statewide General NPDES Permit for Aquatic Herbicide Applications and Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements for Minor Dredging and Fill Activities. The project is funded by the Sonoma County Water Agency, the California Wildlife Conservation Board, the Santa Rosa Subregional Wastewater System and the Sonoma/Marin Mosquito and Vector Control District.

Public comments on the project are invited by contacting John Short at the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (576-2065) or Julian Meisler at the Laguna Foundation (527-9277).