



Laguna Pepperweed Progress Reported to Council
Northeast Plan Seen Moving Slowly to Eventual Vote
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SEBASTOPOL - City officials heard a progress report on what in the past has been a contentious issue on how to control severely invasive perennial pepperweed, which suggests that although the selective use of herbicides to control the weed has been largely successful, long-term control depends on constant monitoring.

According to Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation Restoration Program Director Julian Meisler, some 79 percent of the plant treated in the city's Meadowlark Field and the Wetlands Preserve showed a 79 percent decline in pepperweed cover one year after application of various herbicides in the area.

Although the city doesn't allow the application of herbicides on city property, in February of 2007, the foundation successfully made a deal with the city to allow the use of herbicides while at the same time monitoring the use of a non-herbicidal alternative favored by some council members as well as members of the public, many of whom had spent many hours voluntarily, but unsuccessfully, attempting to control the weed by hand extraction.

The issue, at the time, caused a flare up between those wanting to strictly adhere to the city's non-herbicide use and those concerned that the extreme viability of the toxic invasive threatened not only native biodiversity but also plans to restore larger sections of the Laguna itself.

The work on the city property by the foundation is continuing, according to Meisler's report, including tarping as a control measure, which he said however, "has required a significant investment of time and materials to keep the tarps in place through summer winds, winter flooding and periodic vandalism."

Although the heavy tarps, which are much thicker and heavier than conventional plastic tarps commonly used over woodpiles, boats and backyard equipment, are expected to perform better on higher, upland elevations, Meisler said data on their control of pepperweed will not be available for at least another two years.

Meisler said the work on the city property is part of a larger Laguna restoration effort, the first phase of the foundation's Middle Reach Restoration Project, which seeks to restore a nearly contiguous habitat corridor along some eight miles of the Laguna.

“This first phase includes restoration of riparian forest and oak woodland along a one-point-eight mile segment of the Laguna’s east bank between Highway 12 and Occidental Road,” he said in his report. “Grassland management for the benefit of endangered Sebastopol Meadowfoam is also part of this phase.” Landowners in this reach, he added, include Sebastopol, Balletto Vineyards, Santa Rosa and Sonoma County.

Control methods, he said, included treating some three acres of pepperweed on city property with the herbicide Telar by using handheld spraying equipment in the spring of 2007.

Spraying this year, Meisler said, was conducted in June to avoid conflicts with other uses although the plants were mowed in order to prevent additional seeding. The herbicide Rodeo, was used in areas near the Laguna channel.

No effects on wildlife or plants outside the treatment areas have been noted, Meisler said, noting that all foundation staff involved are “trained ecologists and if any negative effects were to be found, we would stop immediately.”

In addition to the pepperweed control efforts, he said, some 1,500 trees were planted in the Meadowlark Field area this year with several hundred additional plants scheduled to be planted on a total of some 11.5 acres using irrigation water for the new plants from Santa Rosa’s sub regional wastewater treatment facility, apparently without ill effect.

The council, after a few concerns about the use of the herbicides and the wastewater were laid to rest, complimented the foundation on their work and agreed to take part in additional grant requests aimed at increasing the restoration of the Laguna.

In other action, the council resumed discussion on specific elements of the proposed Northeast Area Specific Plan, including on-going concerns over height limits, water supply and commercial square footage issues.

City attorney Larry McLaughlin said specific direction to staff regarding the plan is expected to occur at the council’s September 2 meeting.

It is unclear when the plan will come before the council for a final vote, although it is not expected to take place before the November city council election.

The council also voted to place a memorial plaque and name the gazebo in the Town Plaza after the late architect Michael Black who died of a heart attack in Santa Rosa in April at age 70.

Black, a nationally known co-housing advocate, and who for many years worked out of Sebastopol, designed the Two Acre Wood co-housing project in Sebastopol off Bodega Avenue and was instrumental in creating the Sequoia Village project near Covert Lane which is under construction.

The naming proposal, which was offered by Sebastopol City Councilmember Larry Robinson, also credited Black with helping to develop the city's downtown plan.

Wording on a proposed plaque, which will be ratified at the next council meeting, will include Sanskrit words, which translate into various meanings, including "May we honor God in all we say and do."