

Thursday, June 5, 1969

No Quick Cure For Soquel Creek Pollution

By Bruce McPherson
Sentinel Staff Writer

The waters near the mouth of Soquel Creek are polluted. The question now is, what can be done to remedy the situation?

The answer appears to be "not too much this year," as far as damming the creek to form a swimming area.

Ray Talley, head of the County Environmental Health Department was asked by the City of Capitola to make the study and then "reluctantly" revealed the results. Talley recommended the dam not be built and listed the chances of lifting the pollution warning as "very slim."

Said Talley, "We'll have to monitor the creek for fecal coliform once a week to see if there is a change. We need data, and our staff number is limited, so it may take months before we come up with an analysis. There is no basis for us to change our recommendation now. Even as we correct existing malfunctions of septic tanks and so on, there is the possibility that new violations may arise."

The State Department of Parks and Recreation informed Capitola earlier this week the state would not allow Soquel Creek to be dammed for public swimming until "clearance is given by the Santa Cruz County Health Department."

The state, which owns the beach, said Capitola would have to get a "formal agreement" from the department before the dam could be used again for swimming. It may be possible, however, to dam the creek and use it for boating purposes only.

Fecal coliform is a bacteria that originates from

human or animal intestinal tracts and eventually pollutes natural resources. The state health department has recommended the count not be above 200 in water used for contact (swimming) sports. The county tests showed some count near the creek's mouth at above 450.

Asked if it was possible that other county creeks and streams may have a similar count, Talley replied, "Yes, but not all are dammed for swimming purposes." He said diseases such as typhoid or infectious hepatitis could result from contact with polluted waters.

In order to correct the situation, Capitola officials have asked all persons to cooperate in reporting possible situations that may lead to pollution of the creek.

About a dozen members of the Santa Cruz Junior Chamber of Commerce are meeting Saturday at 8 a.m. at the Blacksmith Shop to walk along the creek's banks in an attempt to "find something."

Capitola building inspector Bill Clarke compared the pollution problem to litter bugging. "Everybody knows it's wrong, but some continue to violate the law anyway."

Clarke said pollution of Soquel Creek may stem from several sources, including faulty septic tanks, open stock yards where livestock sometimes wade in creek tributaries, and/or pigeons nesting at the railroad trestle. Added to this, Clarke said, is the realization that most of the run off (such as pesticides used in gardens) between Porter Gulch and Wharf Road eventually ends in Soquel Creek.

A walk along Soquel Creek and its tributaries shows garbage and trash dumped along the banks,

puddles of stagnated waters that are breeding areas for mosquitos. When the rains come, and those "pools" are washed downstream, they add to pollution of the creek.

In one instance, a hose was found to be inserted in a septic tank and ended at a small vegetable garden, where effluents from the tank were used to fertilize the garden. That garden "fertilizer" was near one of the creek's tributaries and probably entered the creek eventually. This particular situation has been given a "stop notice" by the county.

Capitola has corrected some situations along Soquel Creek already, but not all the problems are within the city limits. City Manager Ryder Ray said it all takes time: the county must issue warnings and then wait for a period of time before condemning a situation.

Capitola, disappointed because a groin will not be built to trap sand at its beach this summer, has seen its problems grow as far as attracting tourists.

Literally thousands of children have used the lagoon for years as a "swimming hole." Without the dam, some merchants are pondering whether it will not have an adverse effect on their business.

The Capitola Begonia Festival Association, which usually uses floats on the lagoon, is considering switching to a street parade this year.

Said Ray, "We hope the enthusiasm of the people to correct this problem does not drop. We want all the cooperation we can get from people to notify us of anything they think may be a contributing factor. We'll be able to come to a solution more quickly this way."



Capitola building inspector Bill Clarke checks one of many stagnated pools that contribute to pollution of Soquel Creek. Faulty septic tanks, open stockyards along the creek beds and natural runoff add to the problem. Capitola cannot dam the creek to create its usual summer swimming hole until the water's bacteria count is reduced from a high of 465 to the state recommended standard of 200.

Water Pollution