

Restraining order blocks permit for Biotech goat farm

Goat Ranch

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SANTA CRUZ — Superior Court Judge Robert Yonts issued a temporary restraining order Tuesday, telling the county not to issue emergency permits for Santa Cruz Biotechnology's goat ranch that would block polluted water from running into riparian corridors. The order was obtained by "Friends of the North Coast" and "Save Our Agricultural Land"

The order allows the Coastal Commission to review the issue when they meet in San Rafael in the middle of July. Yonts set a hearing on July 25 so the issues can be debated after the Coastal Commission considers the issue.

The county was represented by County Counsel Samuel Torres but Santa Cruz Biotech did not have attorneys present. The hearing was held behind closed doors.

Torres walked out of the court without comment. Santa Cruz Biotech did not issue a statement and

The county refused to allow a plan to halt the runoff of polluted water last year that had been endorsed by the Regional Water Quality Control Board.

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could not be reached for comment.

The Coastal Commission had issued a strongly worded letter to former County Counsel Dwight Herr, telling him "a dispute remains: the county maintains that an emergency permit is the appropriate permit, whereas the Coastal Commission's Executive Director maintains that it is not." The letter was signed by Tami Grove, Deputy Director.

She claimed the issue must go to the Coastal Commission for resolution.

Coastal Commission for resolution.

The supervisors took the issue up in closed session earlier in the day but did not make any statements following the meeting.

The neighbors and Grove contend "there is no emergency," and the county does not have the right to issue any permits.

Herr has maintained the law allows the county to issue emergency permits on their own without interference from the Commission.

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The letter was the most strident yet from Grove, who has taken the side of the residents who live near the goat ranch on the North Coast. "The biomedical livestock operation is an unpermitted facility ... We believe that, at a minimum, the appropriate course of county enforcement action here would be to immediately de-intensify the unpermitted use pending the (Local Coastal Plan) required master plan and coastal permit."

In her letter to the supervisors Grove said the "intensity of biomedical goat raising should be immediately reduced as necessary to address water quality impacts and any other land use impacts such as overgrazing."

In bold letters intended to amplify the statement she told the county they should consider her letter a formal request to initiate "appropriate enforcement action" and if they don't, "the Commission has authorized the Director to intervene in the matter."

The county refused to allow a plan to halt the runoff of polluted water last year that had been endorsed by the Regional Water Quality Control Board. When tests were taken during a series of storms in February showing high counts of fecal matter in the runoff, neighbors complained bitterly. The board then reversed itself and agreed to take action.

During the testing period, the county also tested water near a goat farm in the San Lorenzo Valley and found the same high fecal counts existed on that site as well. So far there has not been any action taken to relieve the pollution from the second goat farm.

During their closed session Tuesday, the county refused to go along with a proposal from attorneys for the neighbors that the "status quo remain" but agreed the neighbors would be given two days notice before work got underway.

The County Planning Department said the permits for the work to be carried out on the goat farm had been completed Thursday but had not been picked up by Santa Cruz Biotech.