

2/22/82 SC Stufemel

Bear Creek Water Tests Gets Approval

Bear Creek and wastewater from the Bear Creek Estates sewage treatment plant near Boulder Creek soon will be tested to determine if they have human viruses in them, the San Lornzo Valley Water District board has decided.

District Manager Ed Steffani said the tests may be the first of their kind in the valley.

Directors decided to have the tests done by Dr. Laurence H. Frommhagen of Biogenics Analysis Inc. of Soquel.

Frommhagen will be paid \$1,800 to take two samples from the creek above the point where treated wastewater is being dumped into the creek and to take two samples of the treated wastewater before it's dumped. The tests will start later this week.

The water from the creek will be tested to determine if septic systems are polluting the creek and the treated wastewater will be tested to determine if the Bear Creek Estates treatment facility is working properly in removing contaminants, Steffani explained.

The board received a proposal from Frommhagen for a more extensive testing program along various points on the San Lorenzo River, but decided to have the Bear Creek samplings done for now.

Steffani said the testing program could be expanded to other waterways.

He explained that Bear Creek was selected because it is a problem spot in the district.

The Jan. 4-5 storm destroyed the Bear Creek Estates spray fields where treated wastewater was sprayed over a large area. Since the storm, the district has received a temporary permit to discharge treated wastewater directly into the creek.

But, the permit from the Regional Water Quality Control Board expires April 15 and between now and then, the district needs to come up with a short-term alternative to stream disposal and also with a long-term solution on what to do with human wastes from the Bear Creek area.

Before the storm, the district was designing a system for Bear Creek Estates where treated wastewater would be dumped in large pits and allowed to soak into the ground.

But with the land instability shown in the valley during the Jan. 4-5 storm, the district isn't looking favorably on putting additional water into the ground.

The information from the virus analysis may be helpful to the district in coming up with both a temporary and a permanent solution to the Bear Creek Estates disposal problem, Steffani explained.

The testing isn't being done to show that stream disposal of wastewater should continue, Steffani stressed.

"We want to get the effluent out of the creek by April 15 and we have some ideas now of ways to do that," Steffani stated.

Consultants Gwen Buchholz of Montgomery Engineers and Ed Margason of Woodward & Clyde Consultants are working on a solution to the disposal dilemma and will make recommendations at an upcoming Water Board meeting.

According to Water District Director Russ Husted, it looks as though the district may opt for some sort of spraying method again.

An alternative to the seepage pond, Husted said, may be "extremely high treatment with perhaps spraying it in the summertime and taking the wastewater elsewhere in the winter."

However, the alternative methods pose some problems, he added.

"The cheaper methods have problems that we learned about during the storm and the others are expensive. We're between a rock and a hard place. The rock is protecting the environment and the hard place is a hell of a big budget," Husted said.

In a related matter, directors last week unanimously accepted Basin Plan prepared by the Regional Water Quality Control Board with the understanding that the basin plan prohibits stream disposal of treated wastewater in the valley except where benefits can be shown.

Husted said the basin plan is ambiguous on stream disposal of wastewater since it states in one place that wastewater can be disposed of into waterways if benefits can be shown, while in another place it flatly denies this option.

Directors agreed to ask the Regional Water Quality Control Board to clarify what the basin plan states about stream disposal of wastewater.