

Erosion control effort criticized

■ Zayante property: The state urges a cleanup of water district's debris.

BY TERRI MORGAN
Special to the Mercury News

Erosion control at the San Lorenzo Valley Water District has landed the tiny Santa Cruz Mountains utility company in hot water with the state and county.

Both the California Department of Fish

and Game and the Santa Cruz County Planning Department have cited the water district for violating ordinances designed to protect riparian areas. The citations were issued earlier this month after a state game warden investigated two piles of rubble and construction debris that had been dumped on the water district's Zayante property over the past five to seven years.

"I think the whole situation is fairly serious," said Fish and Game Warden Laurel Ulrich. "They'll have to do a major excavation to dig that out, and address

immediate erosion control problems."

The county said the district actually increased erosion in the area.

The dump sites are in an abandoned quarry behind the Zayante fire station, and are within the Olympia Watershed, which drains into Zayante Creek. Jim Mueller, general manager for the water district, said the material was dumped in an effort to prevent the sandy soil on two hillsides from eroding into the creek.

"It's kind of a Catch-22," Mueller said. "We thought we were doing something to

stop erosion. Our staff believed we were in compliance, but apparently we weren't."

Initially, the water district used pieces of broken concrete and rubble in the area, Mueller said. Later, the district piled old pipes, scrap wood and chunks of blacktop onto the sites. In retrospect, he said, using asphalt, which has a petroleum base, as a fill material was not a good idea.

Other trash found at the sites, including broken appliances, was added to the piles by trespassers, Mueller said. The district

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District cited by 2 agencies

■ DUMPING

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recently installed a pair of gates leading to the property to discourage additional dumping by area residents.

The Fish and Game department has cited the water district with four violations, including not having a stream bed alteration agreement, putting petroleum products in an area where it can enter state waters, contributing to sedimentation of a creek and unlawfully depositing garbage within 150 feet of a waterway.

"The worst thing we have to contend with is sedimentation," Ulrich said. "When it gets into the river, it can smother (fish) eggs and cause all kinds of problems."

The county has cited the water district for grading without a permit and for accelerating erosion at the fill sites.

The water district could face additional charges. Ulrich plans to meet with a representative from the Santa Cruz County district attorney's office this week to discuss her report.