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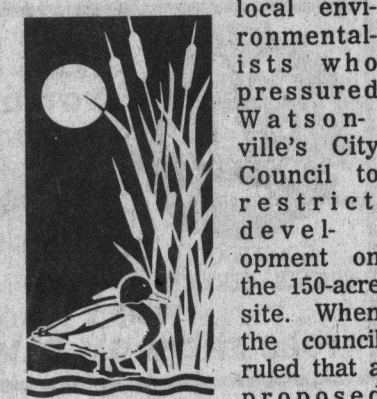
Development near slough stymied by rare tarweed

(This is the last in a series of stories on Watsonville's sloughs and efforts to preserve them.)

By CHELA ZABIN
STAFF WRITER

The rare Santa Cruz tarweed may not exactly be Watsonville's equivalent of the Northern spotted owl, but J. Lohr, the developer who had hoped to build on a parcel where it is located, may see some parallels.

Like the owl, concern for which has led to restrictions in logging in the Northwest, the tarweed drew the attention of local environmentalists who pressured Watsonville's City Council to restrict development on the 150-acre site. When the council ruled that a proposed road through the property had to circumvent the 3.7-acre patch of tarweed and not cut off the tarweed from Watsonville Slough, Lohr declared it wasn't financially feasible to go ahead with the project.



Charles Alexander, a representative of J. Lohr Properties, contacted several times after the council's ruling in May, has said the developer is continuing



Kurt Ellison

Santa Cruz tarweed

to evaluate the feasibility of building on the site, which lies between Highway 1 and 152 and Watsonville Slough. He did not give any other details.

But changing the road isn't the only issue. Members of the Watsonville Wetlands Watch say the setbacks Lohr has suggested around the slough aren't big enough to protect wildlife in the sloughs and surrounding areas. They also want a guarantee that Lohr will protect the tarplant population on site. Lohr had proposed a relocation project.

If the project goes ahead, it

will have to be redesigned because of the change in the road. The local Sierra Club has demanded an additional environmental impact report for the redesigned project. It wants the report to look into what it says is "significant new information" regarding groundwater overdraft and saltwater intrusion.

Maps presented by a consultant to the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency show a cone of groundwater depression immediately below the site, and a saltwater wedge is moving toward it, they say. The EIR for the current project had suggested an on-site well.

The Sierra Club also believes there should have been a more complete survey for the Santa Cruz long-toed and California tiger salamanders on the site. It, too, is calling for on-site preservation of the tarplant and further examination of the effects of proposed grading on the sloughs.

Members of the Watsonville Wetlands Watch and other environmentalists have been lobbying state representatives to look for funds for purchasing the slough and surrounding uplands, most recently meeting with Sen. Henry Mello, representatives of the Coastal Conservancy and Lohr representatives to discuss such a purchase, which would cost an estimated \$2 million. While state acquisition money is tight, there

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Mello said he has supported

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is some pending legislation that could supply funds for such a purchase.

Not everyone agrees The Villages project would have a detrimental effect on wildlife there. Dean Taylor, a botanist working for Lohr, said tarplant-relocation projects have been successful elsewhere and said such a project could provide for longer preservation of the plant than leaving it alone on the property.

John Zentner, a specialist in wildlands restoration, hired by Lohr to restore the slough, said he believes the buffer around the slough proposed by Lohr is sufficient for the protection of the slough. He thinks the resto-

ration proposal developed for Lohr would be extremely beneficial to the slough, since it would involve removing non-native species, creating new slough areas and planting beneficial native species — in a sense, returning the slough to how it might have existed before.

Zentner praised Lohr, saying the proposed restoration is "bigger than anything else provided for in the last decade."

"As a biologist, I'd be happy to restore the whole thing," he said. But, he said, he was satisfied that a lot of good could be done under the current plan.

Meanwhile, the word around City Hall is that The Villages project is dead. Lohr did not return repeated phone calls asking for comment on the status of the project.