

People want lake cleaned, fenced

Live Oak

Residents around Live Oak's Moran Lake told Supervisor Phil Baldwin last Thursday night that they want their lake cleaned up.

But many were emphatic that they didn't want a park that would attract more tourists to an already heavily impacted area.

The county now has plans to spend more than \$160,000 in tax money to clean up the badly-fouled lake and then convert it into a regional recreational facility.

About half of the money for the clean-up would come from the federal government. The remainder would have to be appropriated by supervisors from local revenues.

The catch, according to county

employees, is that the federal government won't approve the county grant application — due by Sept. 15 — unless the county constructs a regional park at the Lake.

A regional park, according to newly-appointed Parks Director Henry Baker, would attract people from a 30-mile radius.

"We don't have a lot of answers and a plan for a park right now," Baldwin told the group at the beginning of the meeting.

"Before the county designs a park, we want as much input as possible."

Baldwin said he would like to see a recreational park developed on some of the now-surplus land owned by the Santa

Cruz County Sanitation District around the East Cliff pumping station.

It would be linked to the county-owned portions of Moran Lake by a right-of-way along the drainage channel that feeds storm water into the lake, and also accounts for much of the pollutants now fouling the lake.

"Moran lake needs to be improved," said county watershed manager Ron Johansen. "It's really a mess right now."

Historically, Moran Lake is the easternmost of a series of coastal lagoons that included Wood's Lagoon (now the yacht harbor), Schwan Lake, and Corcoran Lagoon.

"In the early 1960s," Johansen

told the group, "there was an attempt to fill in Moran Lake and subdivide it."

Part of the fill came from the yacht harbor dredging.

Subdivision attempts were blocked and finally, in 1970, the owner offered it to the county.

"The county purchased the lower part in 1974," Johansen said. "It had been designated a park site in 1973."

Moran Lake is not a lake, said Steve Singer of Johansen's office. "It's a coastal lagoon that drains 620 acres. The headwaters are the K-Mart parking lot."

"Moran Lake suffers from two problems," Singer said. "In the summer, it's a collector of stagnant sea water.

"In the winter, it receives the urban runoff."

Chemist Robert Ashton said the pollutants are oil, grease, heavy metals, and urban trash.

Coupled with the frequent overflows of sewer lines into the lake, the result is a thick layer of black, malodorous silt on the lake bottom and an oil slick on the top of seasonally fluctuating water.

The clean-up effort involves two major construction tasks, a continual monitoring program, and a constant street sweeping program by the county and the city of Capitola.

Johansen said the first step would be to dredge the lake and recontour the water body. This would cost a minimum of \$80,000

if ocean disposal of the dredging spoils is permitted, more if land disposal is mandated.

Second, the present seven-foot diameter culvert under East Cliff Drive would be replaced with a bridge. Cost — \$60,000 or more.

The present concrete pipe annually clogs with sand during the summer months, effectively damming the lake, but allowing tides to deposit salt water in the lagoon.

The sand is washed away by the winter storm water.

Power equipment could be used to clear the waterway under a bridge, Johansen said.

Residents seem to split equally over two possible alternatives for the lake.

Johansen said it would be possible to install a tidal gate at the bridge, keeping a substantial amount of water in the lake year-around.

The second possibility would be to leave it "natural" with the summer months seeing an alteration between a lake and a mud flat — the difference between high and low tides.

Once the clean-up job is completed, said Baker, a park could be established there.

But plans will be drawn up with heavy community input, he stressed.

Homeowner Linda Murphy didn't like the idea of a developed park at the lake, itself.

"Just cleaning it up," she said, "and leaving it alone would be fine. The nicest thing about the area is that it is not a developed park."

Kids, she added, play there now without conventional playground equipment.

Another resident said she wanted to see a nature trail, "but I hate to see it get too commercialized. I think children should stay at home."

Someone else added: "Something has to be done to keep kids and off-road vehicles out. I'd like a natural, low-key park."

One person told Baldwin that the county should remove all of the old, rusted barbed wire there.

Another advocated putting up more barbed wire fences to keep out people.

Additional meetings will be held this spring before any recommendations are made to the full Board of Supervisors.