

THE NEIGHBORHOOD

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Agencies issue new Lake Merced report

Activists charge plan is rehash of first draft

By Kristen Reyes
NEIGHBORHOOD REPORTER

Six months after the release of a draft of a report detailing a plan that would improve the conditions in and around Lake Merced, the final copy of the project has been released — and lake advocates say it is as weightless as its predecessor.

John Plummer, president of the Friends of Lake Merced, (FOLM) a 150-member volunteer organization dedicated to the preservation of the lake, says there is nothing substantial in the new comprehensive management plan that addresses the real issues surrounding the lake, such as lake level, water quality, habitat protection, and recreational-facility maintenance.

"It's really disgusting," Plummer said. "It was done in the traditional bureaucratic way, with a bunch of activities for them to pledge to devote their time to and they do not even have the resources or the people to do an adequate job."

Plummer says FOLM would like to see the city relinquish its hold on the largest body of fresh water in the city and give the Golden Gate National Recreation Area sole control of the lake's care.

In the 56-page report created by the city's Public Utilities Commission and the Recreation and Park Department, the two departments essentially recap the contents of the first plan and address responses to questions that originated from the plan. The purpose of the report was to identify necessary actions and costs to restore, protect, and enhance the

lake's beneficial uses. The plan is expected to be carried out in three phases, all of which were outlined in both the old and the new plans.

Major source of area's water

One of the city's prime natural resources, the lake has been the center of a tug-of-war between the cities of San Francisco, Daly City, and San Bruno; local organizations; and three surrounding golf courses, all of which are seeking ways to restore and preserve the lake. According to statistics cited in the draft of the comprehensive management plan, nine million gallons of water from Lake Merced is extracted daily by the surrounding cities and facilities for irrigation and drinking water.

The lake is fed by a natural aquifer that extends from just north of the Golden Gate Park to south to San Francisco International Airport. The rate of drainage makes it impossible for the lake to stay full and doesn't allow enough time for the lake to replenish itself.

Local voices gone unheard

City officials determined the best way to address the lake's problems would be to focus on the development of its resources and formulate policies and legislative allocations of those resources. But Plummer says officials are simply not equipped to carry out the job and have not taken advantage of the resources that could be available to them, including the wealth of interested volunteers available to do work.

Nancy Koors, also a member of FOLM said the public was invited by the city to air its concern and offer possible solutions to the lake's deteriorating condition. However, she said, when they showed their support and put in a good deal of time and effort on the project, what the had to say fell

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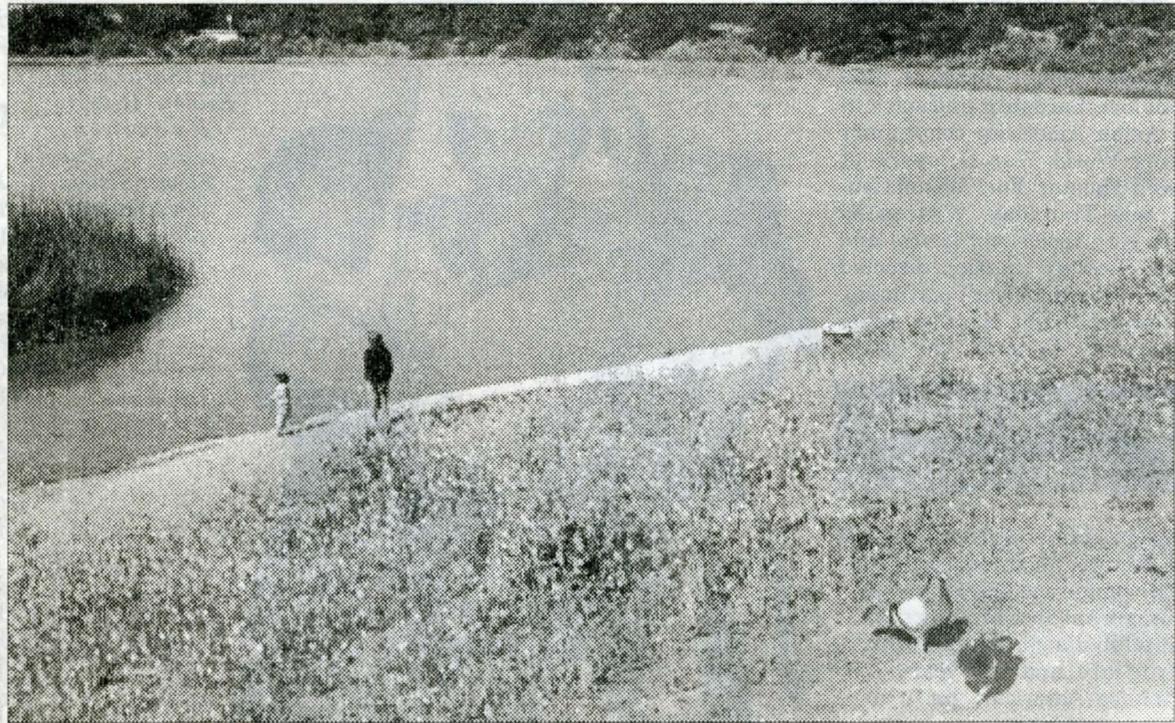


PHOTO: RORY McNAMARA

THREATENED: A report detailing plans to improve Lake Merced has come under fire by locals who charge that the plan carries no weight and that the agencies that wrote it are not equipped to carry it out.

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on deaf ears.

"It just seems that our input was not very effective," said Koors, who is fearful that the latest plan is simply another roadblock for the lake's restoration.

"I am really discouraged, because I feel that the new plan is just a whole new series of delays and that the city will not take action," she said, adding that being involved in the year-long process has been exhausting. "It just goes on and on and you just get tired of it."

Repeated phone calls by the *Independent* to Recreation and Park Department's project man-

ager, Marvin Yee, were not returned.

Michael Carlin, water resource planning manager with the city's PUC, says the latest plan is based on public review and comment so that the public can see how concerns were addressed in the plan. Carlin said the concerns of members of FOLM were adequately addressed in the revised plan, however, the issues surrounding Lake Merced are complex and that there are no "quick fixes" to its restoration.

No study on entire lake

Ironically, according to Carlin, the department is hampered by the fact that not one comprehen-

sive study has been performed on the lake as a whole, rather studies have been carried out on particular sections. "There have been studies here and studies there, but no one has looked at the lake as a whole," Carlin said.

Carlin had no comment as to why such a study has not been done.

Officials have begun to implement certain phases of the plan, including "looking at ways to supplement lake levels," Carlin said, and how it will affect the native plants along the lake. The commission is also trying to ascertain what its capable of doing to move further along on the restoration of the body of water.