

MERCED
NEIGHBORHOOD

Lake Merced suffering, group requests investigation

Community group turns to Health Dept.

By Melissa T. Miller

SPECIAL TO THE INDEPENDENT

A community group dedicated to preserving Lake Merced recently asked the Health Department to do an environmental impact review before granting the Olympic Club permission to build another water well.

The Olympic Club filed an application with the San Francisco Bureau of Health Management January 4 to build a new well near the intersection of Skyline Boulevard and Lake Merced Boulevard.

Jerry Cadagan, co-founder of the Committee to Save Lake Merced, in his letter to the Health Department, charges that a review of the application is required under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) since the pumping of groundwater from the Westside Basin aquifer has an adverse environmental effect on both the aquifer and Lake Merced, which is hydraulically connected to the aquifer.

"We received the letter, and we are looking into it," said Ken Sato, chief inspector at the bureau. "In 25 years with this department, we're never done an environmental review for just an individual well. There just aren't that many wells going in, so this is a new one to me. Usually, if a well were part of a bigger project like Pac Bell Park, the impact of

the well would be part of the Environmental Impact Report for the entire project. Those are the only times we've looked at an environmental review when considering an application for a well. But, given the circumstances around what's going on at Lake Merced, we definitely need to look into this."

Sato says he has meetings scheduled with the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission and the city's Planning Commission to determine how he should proceed. Sato said the meetings would determine which agency would make the decision regarding the Olympic Club's well application.

A diagram on the application shows that the existing well, just over the county line in San Mateo County, will be abandoned. According to Olympic Club lawyer Bob Maddow, that well is no longer working.

"The casing on the old well failed," says Maddow. "The new well is meant to be an in-kind replacement, drawing from the same productive section of the aquifer."

The new well calls for a casing depth of 600 feet, and an annular seal depth of 100 feet, meaning the new well can draw water from 100 feet underground to more than 600 feet underground.

The Olympic Club's application for a new well was filed just two weeks before California Trout (CalTrout) filed a petition with the State Water Resources Board and seven other state and county agencies to examine the water pumping levels occurring

See LAKE MERCED, page 10A

LAKE MERCED

continued from page 8A

from the Westside Basin aquifer, a natural underground reservoir of water that runs from underneath the Golden Gate Park to the San Francisco International Airport.

CalTrout alleges that the declining water quality and dropping water levels of Lake Merced are directly related to the amount of water pumped from the Westside Basin aquifer. CalTrout hopes that all of the golf courses and cemeteries in San Francisco and Daly City, as well as the San Francisco Zoo and Golden Gate Park, begin to use recycled water to irrigate as soon as possible.

Lake Merced was once considered one of the best urban fishing areas in the country, according to CalTrout executive director Mark Bergstrom. Photos from the 1950s show the lake's banks crowded with people and hundreds of fishing lines in the water on opening day of the fishing season. Now the water level is too low, and the water is too warm, to sustain a viable fish population.

"The club has been pumping legally from the same spot for over 80 years," Maddow continued. "The club has always said that if someone comes up with a proposal for recycled water that meets our quality and quantity needs at the cost requirements of California water law, we will

definitely consider it. The clubs aren't trying to run away; there just isn't any recycled water for them to get right now. No one is producing any."

Neither San Francisco nor San Mateo counties have a recycled water program. All the surrounding Northern California counties, including Alameda, Contra Costa and Sonoma, do use recycled water for irrigation projects.

"Anyone sucking water from the ground only 100 yards away from Lake Merced obviously isn't doing the lake any good," said John Plummer, Friends of Lake Merced member.

CalTrout has asked that the agencies named in their 43-page petition respond by May 31. CalTrout claims that it has not yet received any communication from any of the co-defendants named.

Correction

On February 6, the *Independent* incorrectly reported that the Lake Merced Task Force, with California Trout, filed a petition with the California State Water Resources Control Board, five other state agencies, and both San Francisco and San Mateo counties.

The Lake Merced Task Force is not a petitioner in the lawsuit.