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Diehard weeds still flourish in Delta

by Ruth Roberts

Nov 17, 2011 | 1047 views | 1 | 6 | |



Delta weeds such as these along a property owner's dock on Dutch Slough are taking over portions of Bethel Island. Residents are lobbying to get the Department of Boating and Waterways and other local agencies to help eradicate the weeds, as was the case in Discovery Bay last spring. Photo courtesy of Clark Fratus

Proliferation of the egeria densa weed has been significantly reduced in the waters of Discovery Bay since the Department of Boating and Waterways (DBW) began efforts to eradicate the Delta pests late last spring. But in neighboring Bethel Island, where the weeds continue to run amok, the situation is less rosy.

“We’re feeling a little neglected out here,” said Clark Fratus, who owns property on Dutch Slough. “And in the past six months it’s only gotten worse. The vines grow up from the bottom, crawl up the sides of the levies and wrap themselves around the boat props. It feels like a never-ending battle.”

Fratus is only one of an increasing number of frustrated Bethel Islanders struggling to keep the weeds – which include the egeria densa, water hyacinths and other persistent plants – at bay while

lobbying to grab the attention of anyone who will listen.

Last spring, Supervisor Mary Piepho held a town meeting on Bethel Island in which Fratus said she contended that the Department of Boating and Waterways would be tackling the weed situation, but only in the most needy locations. Those locations, according to Fratus, included only Discovery Bay.

"When I asked Mrs. Piepho about Dutch Slough," said Fratus in an e-mail to The Press, "she said, 'Well, you should receive the benefit of the run off of these pellets as the ebb and flow tide carries the residual up and down the river.' Well, that didn't work out."

Piepho said she sympathizes with residents such as Fratus.

"The plan is to administer Bethel Island as a treatment area," said Piepho. "We are all frustrated at the state and federal bureaucratic processes, and we are also frustrated with the lack of appropriate funding for these invasive weeds. But we are thoroughly grateful for DBW's heroic efforts on behalf of the Delta and their efforts to engage with local communities. DBW is working hard to be effective with limited resources and limited legislative authority."

Calls to the DBW were not returned at press time.

Efforts to get Reclamation District 799 on board have also been frustrating, added Fratus, although local resident and former RD 799 board member Diane Shipway believes it's myriad elements that make the Bethel Island project so complicated.

"I've been involved with the ergia densa plant for many years," said Shipway. "And I have worked with the DBW to deal with the problem. The problem has always been more plant than money. There is no solution to the problem, but it can be controlled ... but a lot of money must be spent which the department does not have. And local agencies do not have the funds or jurisdiction to get involved with the problem."

"It's strange how when you want to do a project on the water there are so many agencies that want to oversee it, but when problems arise, none of them have jurisdiction."

Faced with the potential damage to their docks and boats, residents such as Fratus have taken matters into their own hands: cutting and removing the weeds themselves despite warnings from the DBW that such actions will only exacerbate the problem. The weeds, they say, propagate in other locations when left to drift away.

"The DBW doesn't want you to pull them but what other choice do we have?" said Fratus. "I pulled all mine and they came back. It used to be that the weeds would get sucked out with the tides, but not anymore. In a perfect world, the DBW (or in conjunction with the reclamation district) might take care of it. They all need to get together and figure it out. In the meantime, we deal with it as best we can."

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Press Readers:

I know first-hand the severe impact of invasive weeds on the Delta. I took up the charge and convened numerous meetings with local, state and federal leaders to identify how we can work to serve our citizens and the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. We came up with a plan.

I hosted Town Halls in Bethel Island and Discovery Bay last Spring where the Department of Boating and Waterways(DBW)unveiled this treatment plan for Egeria Densa and it ALWAYS INCLUDED portions of Bethel Island as well as portions of Discovery Bay. The well published maps and other materials indicated this as well. We had about 100 folks in Bethel Island and an auditorium full at Discovery Bay who all saw the same maps.

DBW, their scientists and the manufacturer of the treatment product determined the best locations to apply the chemicals. Treatment areas were determined by slough size, tidal flows, depth and width of channels and other criteria. Some areas not treated directly were expected to receive benefit from tidal flows as the chemicals were applied and absorbed. This was a trial process for DBW and we had some significant improvement in certain areas and in other areas, not so much.

In September I provided a county update to the Bethel Island MAC at Scout Hall that included another presentation from Lucia Becerra, acting director of the DBW. Director Becerra described to the Bethel Island residents the impact post-treatment of Egeria Densa as well as how they were extending Egeria Densa treatments in certain areas.

Director Becerra also talked about the

Water Hyacinth flourish and that DBW did not get their treatment permit when originally scheduled so their chemical applications were about a month late.

DBW has since extended the treatment for Water Hyacinth based on my efforts to let them know the Hyacinth growth has been significant in many portions of the Delta.

I join in the frustration that we can't get enough resources to address the many invasive weeds in our Delta and the problem is only going to get worse. Please join me in advocating to our state and federal legislators that they need to properly authorize and fund the Department of Boating and Waterways so DBW can get out there and work with us to address these serious issues.

In the meantime, at the local level I will continue to bring our leaders together and work to get the necessary attention and funding to address invasive weeds in the Delta.

The Delta's economy and our way of life is at risk.

Please call me at 925-240-7260 if you have any questions on this or any other county matter.

Thank you,



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Mary Nejedly Piepho

Supervisor, District III

Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors

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