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Delta weeds on the chopping block

by Ruth Roberts

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It's too soon to call it a done deal, but local supporters and public officials remain cautiously optimistic that the tenacious water weed that wrecked havoc in the backyard bays of Discovery Bay last year will finally get the heave-ho – on the state's dime.

"I'm feeling pretty good," said Jeff Conway, district manager of Reclamation District 800. "Every year they (the state) say, 'No, not this year,'

but I have to say I'm shooting about 80 percent that this is the year they will do something."

Egeria densa, the robust and fast-growing weed commonly found in pet stores and home aquariums, has been a regular uninvited guest in the Delta for years. But last year's perfect storm of temperature, water and sunlight caused the prolific weed to expand its reach, clogging area bays and waterways up and down the Delta, including Discovery Bay and Bethel Island. And though a treatment for the weed is available, it's expensive (approximately \$2,000 per acre) and requires a permit, making it unavailable to residents.

But last week, in a follow-up meeting to last fall's discussion with the Department of Boating and Waterways, County Supervisor Mary Piepho and local officials, including representatives from the Department of Boating and Waterways, Reclamation District 800 and members of Discovery Bay's CSD, met for an update on the possibility of the state-run agency footing the bill for treating *egeria densa* in Discovery Bay and Bethel Island.

"I think we're all very hopeful," said Piepho. "Last fall we had a commitment that they would spray Bethel Island and Discovery Bay, and that is still holding ... I believe the department of boating and waterways sees this as a Delta threat with state impacts, not just a community issue. The tone of the meeting was very positive."

Gloria Sandoval, public information officer for the California Department of Boating and Waterways, agreed. "The meeting did go very well, and we're going to continue to work with Discovery Bay and Bethel Island on a plan," said Sandoval. "We're looking at our treatment site lists, and it's looking pretty positive."

According to Sandoval, the *egeria densa* is treated with a non-toxic chemical called Fluridone. The cost of \$2,000 per acre covers equipment and staffing as well as the substance. It's unclear at this time how large an area will require treatment, but according to Piepho, the state's annual budget for invasive weed

treatment comes to slightly more than \$6 million.

Discovery Bay CSD President Kevin Graves estimated the cost to treat Discovery Bay at around \$600,000. “We have 600 acres in Discovery Bay but only about 300 (acres) need to be treated,” said Graves. “We’re pleased with the response we’re getting from the state and local agencies, and we’re coordinating as best we can to help.”

If all goes as planned, and the state budget continues to allow for the spraying of the weeds, the process is tentatively scheduled to begin in mid-April, before boating season opens. Before then, according to Piepho, there are plans to hold community town hall meetings in early April in Bethel Island and Discovery Bay.

“We’ll begin working on public education and outreach, and the town hall meetings will tell the community about the process, what to expect and what not to expect,” said Piepho. “I think they (Department of Boating and Waterways) are cautiously optimistic and we are, too. We’re moving forward as though we have a yes on this.”

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