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Diehard weeds still flourish in Delta

by Ruth Roberts

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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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