

June 30, 2006

Public Notice for Water Quality Certification and/or Waste
Discharge Requirements (Dredge/Fill Projects)
Sonoma County Water Agency
Ludwigia Control Project
Sonoma County (WDID# 1B06082WNSO)

On June 6, 2006, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) received an application from the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation, on behalf of the Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA), requesting a Water Quality Certification and/or Waste Discharge Requirements (Dredge/Fill Projects) for the *Ludwigia* Control Project in Sonoma County. The proposed project causes disturbances to Waters of the United States associated with the Laguna de Santa Rosa and the Laguna Hydrologic Sub Area No. 14.21, Russian River Hydrologic Unit No. 114.00.

The proposed project is located at the Laguna de Santa Rosa (Laguna) Channel from approximately 1,000 feet west of Stony Point Road to the confluence of the Laguna and Gossage Creek in Rohnert Park; and the Wilfred/Bellevue flood control channel from Highway 101 to its confluence with the Laguna channel. The length of the infested channel area is approximately 13,000 linear feet (Section 22, Township 06N, Range 08W, Quad: Cotati) (APNs 045-033-043, 045-053-033, 045-052-039, 045-051-018, 134-268-006, 134-264-004, 046-021-017, 046-011-013, 046-032-031). The purpose of the project is the mechanical removal and control of the non-native aquatic weed, *Ludwigia*, within the channels to address threats related to West Nile Virus, loss of biodiversity, water quality, and flooding.

The *Ludwigia* Control Project (Project) includes two phases: an initial phase to contain the impacts of the infestation in the worst-infested areas; and a long-term control strategy based on restoring the Laguna ecosystem to make it more resilient to aquatic weed infestation. The initial phase of the Project plans an integrated pest management approach that includes herbicide treatment to control *Ludwigia* plants in project areas, and mechanical weed removal to reduce further eutrophication from decaying vegetation, as well as five years of monitoring during and after treatments. Herbicide treatment was initiated in the summer of 2005 and recommenced on June 26, 2006 under the Statewide General NPDES Permit for the Discharge of Aquatic Pesticides for Aquatic Weed Control in Waters of the United States (WDID No. 1B05047N SON). Enrollment under the General NPDES Permit does not cover dredging and/or filling activities. Therefore, mechanical removal activities for the removal of *Ludwigia* from the Laguna and Bellevue-Wilfred channels are proposed for coverage under a Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements for Minor Dredging and Fill Activities.

The proposed project consists of the mechanical removal of herbicide treated *Ludwigia* within the Bellevue-Wilfred channel using a 62.5-foot long reach excavator from maintenance roads located directly adjacent to the channel. Where the channel is too wide, the excavator may occasionally travel partially down the bank in areas that will not impact existing native and riparian vegetation. Aquatic harvesters will be used to remove vegetation from the main Laguna channel and will be placed within the channel by a crane. The proposed biomass haul out area is located in a pre-existing gap in the woody riparian vegetation. Disturbed soils will be seeded with a mix of native grass and sterile erosion control grass. Seeds will be covered with sterile hay or erosion control cloth depending upon the steepness of the bank.

It is anticipated that approximately 5,000 cubic yards of biomass will be removed during the 2006 and 2007 removal activities. Biomass will be stockpiled at the Cotati Tanks and the City of Santa Rosa's Brown Farm where it will be windrowed, dried, shredded, and disked into the soil.

The Project is scheduled to begin after June 15th and end before October 15th during 2006 and 2007. The Project area is considered a migration corridor for salmonid species. Consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) concluded that the Project will occur outside of the migration period and will therefore avoid impact.

Compensatory mitigation for this project will be attained through the revegetation and maintenance of approximately 2,100 linear feet of channel bank. Mitigation is proposed for two locations: 350 linear feet of the Bellevue-Wilfred channel north of Millbrae Avenue, and 450 linear feet of the channel just north of the confluence with the main Laguna channel. It is proposed that trees, riparian shrubs, and groundcover will be planted to increase structural diversity. Survivorship will be monitored for three years with an expected 80% survival rate. Strategies for controlling *Ludwigia* over the long-term include restoring the riparian canopy to increase shading, developing a biological control program, and restoration of historic flow patterns. Long-term goals also include reductions in nutrient loading and control of sediment inputs.

Non-compensatory mitigation measures include minimizing turbidity to the maximum extent possible by ensuring that 1) the pace of work is controlled at all times; 2) work is carried out in an upstream to downstream direction to allow existing *Ludwigia* to act as a filter of turbid waters; and 3) a silt curtain is deployed at the downstream end of the project area to prevent turbid water from leaving the site.

The Regional Water Board, as the lead California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) agency, has determined that this project is Categorical Exempt from CEQA; Section 15301 – Existing Facilities.

Staff is proposing to regulate this project pursuant to Section 401 of the Clean Water Act (33 USC 1341) and/or Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act Authority. In addition, staff will consider all comments received during a 21-day comment period that begins on the first date of issuance of this letter. If you have any questions or comments, please contact staff member Michelle Jensen at (707) 576-6711 or at mjensen@waterboards.ca.gov within 21 days of the posting of this notice.

The related documents and comments received are on file and may be inspected or copied at the Regional Water Board office, 5550 Skylane Blvd., Boulevard, Suite A, Santa Rosa, California. Appointments are recommended for document review. Appointments can be made by calling (707) 576-2220.