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Saturday, May 31, 2003

Local News

Posted on Tue, May. 27, 2003

The Mercury News

Popular lake bogged down

AS BAY WETLANDS ARE RESTORED, RISING SEDIMENT

HINDERS MAINTENANCE AT SHORELINE ATTRACTION

By Joshua L. Kwan
Mercury News

The city of Mountain View's wildlife restoration efforts have gone so well that they are beginning to choke Shoreline Lake, where thousands of Peninsula residents sail, kayak and windsurf each year.

The 50-acre man-made lake is pumped full of water from San Francisco Bay through intake pipes in Charleston Slough in Mountain View. But lately, the pipes are having a harder and harder time drawing water.

That's because the city's attempt to restore the slough to a tidal marsh has been succeeding beyond expectations. Several years ago, the city installed an extensive system of gates and pipes in the slough to help return the area to a wetland.

The silt that builds up to form the wetland has begun clogging the pipes that pull water into the lake. Now, the city has to figure out a way to continue its wetlands restoration while maintaining a lake that's become a favorite weekend destination.

``The good news is the bay is being restored," said City Manager Kevin Duggan. ``The bad news is it's reducing our ability to draw water from the bay."

Shoreline Park, which includes a golf course and the lake, was built partly on a garbage dump and a former hog farm. The park, developed in the early 1980s, was envisioned as a regional attraction. Today, more than a million visitors use

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the park each year, according to the city.

The lake has always been used for human-powered or wind-powered recreation, from dinghies to pedal boats and from windsurfing to the more recently popular kayaking. ``It's a source of pride for the city," said Christina Ferrari, operator of Shoreline Aquatic Center, a privately run business that offers a variety of lessons and rents equipment to visitors.

Ferrari said more than 1,100 children last year took lessons in dinghy sailing, windsurfing, kayaking and canoeing. Another 750 adults enrolled in similar classes.

On Memorial Day, Gary and Mary Miller of San Jose brought their three children, ages 9, 7 and 3, to Shoreline Park for a day of biking and an hour of splashing around in a pedal boat. It was their first time at the park as a family.

``What a good place for summer activities," Gary Miller said.

He and the children strapped on life vests, gingerly hopped onto the boat and off they went, tilting slightly to Miller's side.

Dave Greenberg recently began using the lake, too.

``For beginning windsurfing, it's one of the better spots," said the 34-year-old Los Altos engineer. ``And you can't beat the convenience for people who live down here."

There are similar facilities in Foster City and Richmond, Greenberg said. But Shoreline Lake has gentler winds, and its enclosed environment offers calmer water, he said.

The lake is suffering from the effects of an environmental project that's been, in the eyes of the city, perhaps too successful.

``We are starting to pull in a lot of sediment," said Paula Bettencourt, the assistant community services director overseeing the project. ``We can no longer pump as many hours a day as we used to."

Pumps once delivered water to the lake 24 hours a day. Now, the pumps can operate only 14 hours a day because at low tide the silt blocks access to the pipes. Silt has also damaged the blades on the pumps at a much quicker rate,



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raising the cost of maintenance. Every six months, the blades wear out and must be replaced at a cost of \$5,000 to \$7,000.

The lake typically receives a complete replenishment of water every 28 to 32 days. A fresh supply of water is essential; stagnation can make the lake unsafe for humans.

Water from the bay enters Charleston Slough and is pumped into Shoreline Lake, where it is later pumped out to Permanente Creek and back to the bay.

City officials said they have long been aware that returning Charleston Slough to a tidal marsh would hamper the lake's ability to be replenished with a fresh supply of water, but they didn't plan on having to deal with the problem so soon.

One solution is to extend the intake pipe farther into the bay, but that will probably carry significant construction costs. Another possibility is to bring water from another source. The city is still studying the problem.

``It's happening far sooner than anyone expected, and it's created quite a maintenance headache," said Cathy Lazarus, the city's public works director.

If the city does nothing and allows the lake to go dry?

``We can have the world's largest sand volleyball courts," joked Duggan during a recent tour of the facility.

``Or a community rice paddy," laughed council member Rosemary Stasek.

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