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SEBASTOPOL

Cleanup

raises hopes for future

Barlow wastewater could be a boon for Laguna park

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Sonoma West Editor

SEBASTOPOL

Consultants hired to clean up the Laguna de Santa Rosa following a discharge of apple waste into the waterway believe that the remediation has returned the Laguna to its best condition in years.

And ongoing remediation and treatment of apple waste at the Barlow Company plant on Morris Street could result in a system that utilizes all the plant's wastewater to irrigate landscaping at the plant and possibly trees in the city's Laguna Park.

An illegal discharge of apple waste was discovered in the Laguna Sept. 4. A break in a city-owned and operated disposal system pipe leaked an unknown amount of waste into the Laguna, turning the waterway black for about a half-mile stretch. The system has since been shut down and a phase-out of the disposal system is being considered. Barlow's wastewater was pumped under the Laguna and sprayed on a pasture on the east side.

The city of Sebastopol and the Barlow Company have accepted responsibility for the spill. Barlow's consultants, however, believe that the damage to the Laguna was not as serious as critics claim, and their remediation has improved conditions in the waterway.

Daniel Wickham and Rob Rawson of International Organic Solutions said that their work immediately following the discharge was

slowed by a lack of information. "The lack of information early on made it difficult for evaluation and treatment," said Rawson. "There was no base line information on the Laguna ... how clean does the Laguna have to be? We had nothing to compare it to. When we looked upstream (away from the spill) we had a degraded waterway."

Wickham said that "everybody acknowledges that the entire Laguna watershed is degraded."

Rawson said "we had a difficult time understanding what the baseline was ... so we could know when we were done."

After consulting with officials at the Department of Fish & Game, it was decided to use a "soluble chemical oxygen demand" measurement to gauge the water quality during the cleanup. They also monitored dissolved oxygen levels.

The remediation consisted of aerating the Laguna water with a series of pumps that spray water into the air, and the use of a custom-cultured bacteria that consumes organic matter, in this case apple waste.

The same type of bacteria is now being used in the plant's wastewater system, a sort of pre-treatment of the wastewater before it is pumped to the city's abandoned sewer ponds for storage.

"About a week after the remediation started, we saw a real sharp improvement," said Wickham. "It returned to very high quality conditions." [Please see *Laguna* page A10]