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**Ludwigia war not won yet**

**\$700,000 added cost expected in effort to control water weed in Laguna**

**By Bleys Rose, Press Democrat**



The war against the water weed Ludwigia that is clogging the Laguna de Santa Rosa will cost another \$700,000, with green-conscious generals admitting eradication is probably impossible.

"The goal is no longer eradication, but control and reduction so Ludwigia is no longer dominant," said Julian Meisler, restoration project manager for the Laguna Foundation, which led last summer's weed removal program.

Meisler said Ludwigia removal "cost more and was far more labor intensive than we anticipated."

Still, crews will return to the battlefield - water channels and flood plain areas - in the middle of June to try and stay a step ahead of the invasive weed.

A glyphosate-based herbicide was not as effective as hoped, so crews will test another one, triclopyr, to see if it works any better. Both chemicals are certified for aquatic use.

Meisler said glyphosate's "kill rate" was a disappointing 75 percent. He speculated the chemical didn't work as well as hoped because of how it was sprayed, because plants were too dense or because spraying occurred too late in Ludwigia's growth cycle.

Spraying began in mid-July as a result of growing concern that the weed was harboring mosquitoes that could spread West Nile virus.

Sonoma County Supervisor Mike Reilly, whose west county district includes the Laguna,

said that although public health issues remain a top priority, restoration of the Laguna will require long-term commitment.

"Ludwigia's been there for 11 years and nobody has done anything, until West Nile

virus sparked concern because mosquito control officers couldn't get through the weeds," Reilly said. "This is a short-term fix for a very long-range effort."

Reilly said county supervisors were surprised by the heaviness and density of the biomass of weed and roots below the water's surface. Estimates that the total cost for the three-year Ludwigia removal program would be about \$1.7 million were not out of line with the difficulty of the task, he said.

About \$925,000 has already been spent, with about 65 percent of funding coming from the Sonoma County Water Agency and the California Wildlife Conservation Board. The rest comes from the Marin/Sonoma Mosquito & Vector Control District and the Santa Rosa Subregional Wastewater Treatment Plant.

Reilly said supervisors would likely consider funding this summer's Ludwigia removal program next month.

Crews employed by Clean Lakes Inc. of Martinez removed a total of 5,388 tons of Ludwigia, some from Laguna channels and some from the flood plain.

Removal in the channels was far more effective because an excavating harvester with a long reach was used to pull out the weed, Meisler said. Removal in the flood plain was less successful and will require testing of different herbicides this summer, he said.