



County of Santa Cruz

PARKS, OPEN SPACE & CULTURAL SERVICES

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JOE SCHULTZ, DIRECTOR

Press Release

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COUNTY PARKS STAFF PURSUES FUNDING TO RESTORE FREEDOM LAKE

For the past two years the County of Santa Cruz Parks Department has been working to resolve the hyacinth problem in Freedom Lake. This lake has been a treasured public landscape in south Santa Cruz County since it was bequeathed to the Parks Department by the Bert Scott Family in the 1970's. The lake has also had an important role in the history of Santa Cruz County. Over the past century it served as a livelihood for the Chandler Family, who used to drain and farm the lake in the 1920's. In the 1960's a popular boating and fishing concession operated on Freedom Lake. The lake has a varied history and a strong place in residents' memories.

It is unclear when the hyacinth was introduced to the lake. Water hyacinth (*Eichornia crassipes*) is still commonly sold in local nurseries and residents should be aware of the plant's potential dangers to ecosystems. The plant is already a nuisance in the California Delta. The California Department of Boating and Waterways has spent \$25 million over 22 years on water hyacinth control in the Delta alone.

In fall 2007 County of Santa Cruz Parks Department staff contracted with an ecological consultant to conduct surveys of the lake and produce a biotic report for environmental review. Staff researched with various contractors the best methods for hyacinth removal and prepared a management plan for initial removal and follow-up monitoring and maintenance. These documents were submitted to the County Planning Department and permits for the project were issued last month. Last year the State Coastal Conservancy submitted a grant in partnership with the County Parks Department to US Fish and Wildlife's National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Program for funding to restore Freedom Lake. Although this application was not successful, US Fish and Wildlife grant coordinators encouraged the agencies to apply again in 2009.



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On March 10, 2009 the County of Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors authorized the Parks Department to submit applications for the Freedom Lake Restoration Project as funding opportunities arise. The County Parks Department will be submitting three grants this spring with the help of many local partners including: the State Coastal Conservancy, US Fish and Wildlife, California Department of Fish and Game, Ecology Action, Inc., and the Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County. Two of the grant programs are funded through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Award notifications for these two grants are in June 2009. The other grant program is funded through US Fish and Wildlife; award notifications for this grant will be in January 2010.

The County of Santa Cruz Parks Department has invested approximately \$40,000 to date to fund permitting, perform biological surveys, retain a grant consult, and coordinate the project. The County's budget shortfall makes funding the entire removal costs impossible without supplemental funding. It is the County's hope that funding may be secured as soon as possible so that the lake can once again fulfill the Scott family's wishes to provide "*a stable sanctuary for fish and water fowl...a mixture of passive and active recreation opportunities for the entire area*". To find out more about the Freedom Lake Restoration Project please call Santa Cruz County Parks at: (831) 454-7901.