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Wastewater dispute nearly resolved

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A dispute between the Bass Lake Action Committee and the El Dorado Irrigation District seems headed for a resolution.

Both parties met recently with representatives from the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board and El Dorado County Department of Transportation regarding wastewater discharged onto the private property of an El Dorado Hills resident and Bass Lake Action Committee member.

The resident petitioned the committee for help in May when she was unable to reach a solution with EID, according to a complaint filed by the committee to the regional water quality board.

EID officials say they have a permit from the water quality board to make the infrequent discharges, each time flushing hundreds of thousands of gallons of water from drinking water tanks installed in Bass Lake in 2004.

The twin 4-million gallon tanks carry treated drinking water to nearby homes, businesses and other customers in the area.

Water quality board officials, however, have yet to take a stance on the issue.

While the board did issue a permit to EID, its authority only pertains to water quality issues.

"We are reviewing our legal authority in this case," said board member Ken Landau. "Whether it's a problem that's within our authority is something we are looking at."

Bass Lake Action Committee president John Thomson, Ph.D., has taken issue with the permit, saying the water board's authority doesn't extend to drainage issues.

EID flushed the tanks three times in the past year, once because of a malfunction in October 2005 and twice to allow inspection of the tanks' interior coating in March and May of this year.

The parties have met twice in the past two weeks to discuss the issue. Thomson says that while it's his understanding that EID doesn't plan on flushing the tanks again, it wasn't until his committee filed its formal complaint that any action was taken

"Their credibility has been somewhat tarnished," he said.

EID general counsel Tom Cumpston disputes this, saying the district has been in contact with the resident and the Bass Lake Action Committee all summer looking for a resolution.

Cumpston adds that it wasn't until he received a call from a reporter that he even became aware of the formal complaint.

"They didn't see fit to send it to EID, the party which they were complaining against," he said. "I don't think EID has been remiss in any way in responding (to this matter)."

In a June 1 letter to Thomson, Cumpston explains the district doesn't anticipate any further discharges in the foreseeable future - "barring a facility failure or other emergency."

The letter goes on to say that a major residential development in the Bell Ranch area is planning to routinely use the same swale for the development's stormwater runoff.

"If so, the frequency, quantity and peak flows from this use will dwarf any impact from the district's use," the letter states.

"From our point of view, EID is really a bump on a log in this matter," said Cumpston.

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