

El Dorado water district willing to talk with critics

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The El Dorado Irrigation District general manager says he is prepared to sit down with representatives of an environmental group to try to head off a potentially costly lawsuit.

Jim Abercrombie said the EID board has directed him to meet with representatives of the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance, which advocates for conservation of California fisheries, to review their claims, district practices and system improvements.

EID officials this week responded to the alliance's notice of intent to sue for illegal sewage spills, overflows and discharges into creeks that flow into the Cosumnes River and from there to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

They characterized as "ridiculous" the allegations by the alliance of mismanagement of the sewer collection and treatment system.

In an Oct. 28 posting on the organization's Web site announcing plans to sue the district, Bill Jennings, the alliance executive director, said, "EID's sewage collection and wastewater treatment system is a public health and environmental hazard."

"The district's failure to provide adequate facilities and acceptable levels of maintenance for wastewater control," he continued, "indicates an outrageous and egregious disregard for the health of area residents and poses a clear threat to the integrity and survival of local creeks, the Cosumnes River and the Delta's fish and wildlife resources."

The alliance also accuses the district of underreporting spills from its Deer Creek and El Dorado Hills wastewater treatment plants.

In a news release Monday, Abercrombie challenged alliance allegations regarding the number of treatment plant violations and the severity of leaks and spills.

"The majority of leaks and spills ... are less than 10 gallons in volume," he said. "Many of them are confined to customer premises and never reach the environment."

Since 2000, he said, the district has spent nearly \$108 million to upgrade the wastewater treatment plants and replace or repair collection lines.

The alliance in August named the district as an interested party in a lawsuit against the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board for issuing a water-quality permit for to the district's Deer Creek plant, south of Cameron Park.

Tom Cumpston, district counsel, said the standard for proving allegations under the federal Clean Water Act is very low.

If the alliance sues and wins, he said, "It would put a significant additional strain on EID's finances and operating budget as well as our customers' pocketbooks."

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