

TO ALL OF OUR NEIGHBORS AND FRIENDS LIVING ON SMITH CANAL**The Smith Canal Project****The Progress Forward and the Few Ripples Along the Way**

Almost a year has passed since the City of Stockton, at the encouragement of Councilman Larry Rustaller, invited the Friends of Smith Canal (FOSC) to meet with the many agencies governing the Smith Canal waterway and Yosemite Lake. Their goal was to provide a forum for these agencies and FOSC to discuss the cleanup and preservation of this community asset, recognizing that Smith Canal and the waterways within the city could become a trademark of our Delta community. Directed by the city manager's office, each agency defined their jurisdiction. Project manager Carolyn Cook compiled the information for use in developing the seven-phase plan, an agency-wide cooperative effort that we currently see in implementation.

The Successes (Phases I & II)

Last July 26th, FOSC with members of the City's Smith Canal Project sponsored their first cleanup day for the program. Stockton's Neighborhood Services Department spent the preceding week with skimmer boats removing surface debris and identifying items that were submerged and needed to be removed from the waterway. For four hours, FOSC and volunteers from the neighborhood and Knights of Columbus, along with many city and county services worked hand in hand to fill five large trucks. The City also provided dumpsters at three locations for canal residents to deposit cleanup debris from their personal property. In total, over 9 tons of trash, debris, tires, shopping carts, household appliances, sunken boats, deteriorated dock structures, and other asundry junk were removed that week.

This cleanup effort also identified a sunken car in the canal off Shimizu. When two cars were ultimately pulled from the canal, Neighborhood Services brought in sonar equipment to further survey the bottom of the canal. This investigation uncovered another 26 cars, along with what is believed to be 7 more boats, a 50 foot barge, and numerous downed trees that are further polluting the waterway and imperiling the navigability of the canal.

In September, in conjunction with the California Coastal Commission, FOSC and San Joaquin County Public Works sponsored another cleanup day. With the results of the July cleanup still apparent at the lake, efforts concentrated on dislodged vegetation along levee banks.

So Where Are We Now?

The City is currently in Phase III of the Smith Canal Project. Working from Yosemite Lake west, Code

Enforcement has been identifying properties with deficiencies that are currently or that could in the future, impact our efforts toward maintaining and improving the conditions in Smith Canal. These efforts are targeting overgrown and/or dead vegetation. Also targeted are dock, deck, and ramp structures that are in need of repair or removal.

Working from the west-end of the canal, Code Enforcement is working on the abatement of the cars and boats identified by the sonar scan. To date an additional 16 cars have been removed.

So What's Next?

There are several more phases in the City's plan. In March, Code Enforcement will begin the abatement phase (Phase IV) of the project. They will remove docks, junk, and debris they have identified as dangerous or imperilous to navigation in the waterway. Upon completion of the abatement phase, the project will team the Departments of Fish and Game and Parks and Recreation to remove downed trees and to implement a tree plan (Phase V). Working with vendors and FOSC, the City will implement the final cleanup phase (Phase VI) of the project to focus on vegetation and debris dislodged by the previous phases of the program.

With cleanup efforts continuing, the last phase (Phase VII) of the City's project calls for ongoing maintenance and repairs. To accomplish this, the City is searching out available grants, and combined opportunities with other programs. They are exploring funding projects with San Joaquin Area Flood Control Agency, and the Municipal Utilities Department (MUD) is working with an environmental agency to identify the source of and remedies for deoxygenation to improve water quality.

There is also a project in the works to provide a barrier along Shimizu to protect against dumping along the levee. MUD and Reclamation District #1614 are looking at alternatives for collecting residue from storm water entering at the pumping stations that discharge into Yosemite Lake and the canal.

The Goods and the Bads

It is easy to quantify the results of the efforts of this past year and to get excited about the future. Yosemite Lake and the canal are cleaner. The city, the county and the community are working together. The city and our neighboring waterways to the north and south are hoping the rewards of this project can translate into programs and standards for all waterways in the city. But this has been a trek into unknown waters. (Forgive the pun).

In an effort to establish standards and expectations for maintaining the canal, many warning citations have been issued that advise homeowners that they need to address maintenance and repair issues to their properties in order to meet the goals of this program. Unfortunately the "citation" mechanism the City and Code Enforcement used to notify homeowners offended many (including active members of FOSC).

The city assures us that their intent is to work with each homeowner regarding the circumstances of what they identified as deficiencies and to arrive at the best solution for all. Basically anything that impairs or could impair the ability for someone to navigate the canal, or any condition where debris could become dislodged into the waterway is being addressed so as to eliminate that exposure.

Additionally the program is missing a component for addressing welcomed wildlife, although all parties agree that this issue is vital in maintaining the ecological environment of the canal.

Conclusion

The City has funded over \$75,000 to implement this project to clean up Smith Canal. They have assumed responsibility for the waterway and have a goal that this project will be the model for all waterway programs within the city. Friends of Smith Canal and community groups like us can feel their influence is affective in directing the environment in which they live. There has been and there will be a few ripples in the water before we find the ongoing effort to preserve Smith Canal smooth running, but we all should be able to recognize the progress and the accomplishments this past year and the plans for the future.

FAQ is about recent Code Enforcement efforts along Smith Canal

Q: Why is there so much activity on the canal?

A: The City of Stockton and San Joaquin County are undertaking efforts to clean up Smith Canal. They have agreed that the city will take the lead on coordinating cleanup activities. Both Stockton and San Joaquin County feel they can use the clean up of Smith Canal as a prototype for cleaning and maintaining other public water ways.

Q: Who are Friends of Smith Canal, and what do they have to do with the city/county's sudden interest in the Canal?

A: Friends of Smith Canal (FOSC) is an association of residents who live along the canal and want to preserve and enhance its natural beauty. FOSC has no official status, but hopes to provide a channel for information and communication between canal residents and the many agencies with jurisdiction over the canal and its banks. Membership is open to all. Over the past two years FOSC members have worked with city and county officials to improve conditions on Smith Canal through clean up projects. The city and county's choice of Smith Canal as a prototype for their current seven-phase project is the result of FOSC's strong neighborhood support for improving the canal.

Q: Is FOSC behind the citations that many canal residents have been receiving since Thanksgiving?

A: NO. Phase III of the city/county cleanup program is identification of code violations. FOSC has opened a dialogue with city code enforcement to obtain the answers to common questions presented here and to learn where and how residents can raise individual concerns. FOSC hopes to provide a forum where residents with common interests can work together with the city to find satisfactory solutions to all problems related to the canal.

Q: What are the warning citations about anyway?

A: Notices especially focus on violations that have a direct impact on navigation and/or water quality in the canal. Warnings are designed to alert bank residents about steps they must take to help preserve the canal.

More FAQs

Q: Are the code enforcement notices part of a larger project?

A: Yes. Code enforcement activities are part of a seven-phase project to improve the canal. Earlier phases included cleanup of the banks, “vacuuming” of materials off the top of the water, and removing submerged cars and boats from the canal. The city has also commissioned engineering studies to determine sources of pollution in the canal, and identify possible remedies.

Q: Why have some areas gotten notices and others have not?

A: Code Enforcement officers review different sections of the canal during different weeks and months. All sections are being reviewed this winter

Q: Why are the notices coming from the city if I live in the county?

A: The City of Stockton has agreed to take the lead on the canal clean up. San Joaquin County agreed that, for this project, city code enforcement officers would have jurisdiction on enforcement issues on the canal, regardless of whether a residence is in the city or the county. Property owners in both the city and the county are held to the same code standards.

Q: Who do I contact if I don’t understand what needs to be done to come into compliance with the code?

A: Contact the Code Enforcement officer whose name and number appears on the compliance notice.

Q: Why are the Code Enforcement officers concerned about the vegetation hanging over the water?

A: One of the factors that affects water quality in the canal is the amount of dissolved oxygen available in the water. High amounts of dissolved oxygen help keep the water clean, and allow the fish to breathe. When vegetation falls in the water, however, it uses dissolved oxygen to rot, thereby decreasing the amount of dissolved oxygen in the water.

Q: Why are enforcement officers concerned about what I grow on the levee bank itself?

A: Code sections note that vegetation should be controlled so that it doesn’t create a home for vermin. If you have concerns about this or any other code violation notice, contact the Code Enforcement Office directly. (See contact information on next page).

Q: Are Code Enforcement officers working with Department of Fish and Game to assure that removing vegetation doesn’t destroy habitat for animals?

A: In this phase, Fish and Game is not involved with the cleanup plan. If you have concerns about habitat on or around your property, contact Fish and Game directly. (See contact information on next page).

Q: Do Friends of Smith Canal support stripping the levee banks?

A: NO. FOSC believes that property owners should have the right to landscape their properties as they wish. We do share a concern about excessive vegetation falling into the canal and creating a dissolved oxygen problem.

Q: Why are the Code Enforcement officers citing property owners for deteriorating structures (decks, docks or boathouses)?

A: Many of the docks and boathouses along the canal have not been repaired in many years. Sections of these deteriorating structures come loose and float down the canal, or sink and become hazards to navigation.

Q: Does FOSC support citing neighbors for deteriorating structures or sunken boats?

A: We are supportive of improving safety and navigation on the canal, including repairing or replacing hazardous dilapidated structures and removing sinking or sunken boats from the canal.

Q: What if I object to the code enforcement requirements?

A: Contact the Code Enforcement officer whose name and number appears on the compliance notice. The officer will discuss your concerns. The city will allow you time to comply if that is what is needed. There is “right of appeal” information on the citation.

GET INVOLVED WITH FOSC. Meet with others who are in the same situation. Learn how others are handling similar problems. Working together, we may be able to find compromises that will satisfy all city, county and resident needs and meet our common goal of protecting the canal community.

Q: What else can I do to help keep the canal clean?

A: Do not dump anything into the canal, including yard wastes. Storm drains run into the canal. Keep storm drains free of anything except water. Cooperate with the new 3-bin trash system to help reduce materials flowing from the streets to the canal.

FOSC Event Calendar – 2004

March

8 – Steering Committee Meeting—6:30 @ Valley Brew
15 – Deadline for Application for Stockton’s Earth Day

April

12 – FOSC General Meeting—7 pm @ Amblers Club
2000 Amblers, Stockton, CA
18 – Stockton’s 16th Annual Earth Day Festival

May

10 – Steering Committee Meeting
15 – FOSC Cleanup Day

June

14 – Steering Committee Meeting

July

12 – Steering Committee Meeting

August

9 – FOSC General Meeting

September

11 – FOSC/California Coastal Commission Cleanup
13 – Steering Committee Meeting

October

11 – Steering Committee Meeting

November

8 – Steering Committee Meeting

December

Happy Holidays!

Meet your neighbors on Smith Canal

Join us on April 12 at 7:00pm at the Amblers Club
Friends of Smith Canal General Meeting

Friends of Smith Canal Project Contacts

For information, questions, or assistance, please contact any of the following:

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Friends of Smith Canal website

www.smithcanal.org

City of Stockton website

www.stockton.ca.us

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Fred Satariano

Code Enforcement
(209) 937-8754

Susan Loyko

Dept. Municipal Utilities – Stormwater Division
(209) 937-8791

County of San Joaquin website

www.co.san-joaquin.ca.us

Steve Gutierrez

County Supervisor
(209) 468-3113

Denise Thomas

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Lori Oldfather

Dept. of Fish & Game – State of California
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California Coastal Commission website

www.coastal.ca.gov

WE LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING TOGETHER AS NEIGHBORS AND *FRIENDS OF SMITH CANAL!*