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Petition decries use of herbicide in milfoil fight

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SANDPOINT -- Pressure is again mounting on the Bonner County commission to rethink plans to barrage milfoil in the Pend Oreille River using herbicide.

The board was given a petition Tuesday insisting the county find other ways to control the submerged noxious weed known for its tenacity and ability to spread. Petition backers say they gathered the names of up to 400 people who oppose the county's plan to use the herbicide Renovate 3, which contains triclopyr.

"We urge you to reevaluate your potentially hazardous decision to combat Eurasian milfoil by injecting 400 gallons of a systemic herbicide -- triclopyr -- starting this September," Jacqueline Smith said as she presented the petitions.

The commission accepted the petition without comment.

Commission Chairwoman Marcia Phillips said on Thursday that the county plans to use every method available to battle milfoil, including suction dredging and the use of herbicide. Letting the problem fester would cause an "economic catastrophe," she said.

"It's a noxious weed. We need to use every resource at our disposal to eradicate it as much as possible," Phillips said.

Commissioners Brian Orr and Jerry Clemons were not immediately available for comment on Thursday.

The county announced earlier this month it is resuming plans to treat milfoil infestations in the river at Thama Slough and from Memorial Field to the U.S. Highway 95 Long Bridge in Sandpoint. The county planned to apply the herbicide this summer, but postponed the treatments because the infestations were too small to be treated effectively.

The treatments are now set for Sept. 22-25. Signs will be posted at the treatment areas and landowners within a quarter-mile radius are urged not to draw drinking or irrigation water from the river for at least five days.

There are no swimming or fishing restrictions in the treatment areas and there are no water use restrictions for those outside the quarter-mile perimeter, according to the county.

Though some landowners approve of the county's intentions, others are steadfastly opposed to the use of Renovate 3, which is manufactured by SePRO.

Renovate received U.S. Environmental Protection Agency registration in 2002, making it the first aquatic herbicide to make the federal register since 1988.

But opponents question the health and environmental effects of using Renovate, despite assurances that the project is safe.

Triclopyr is a skin and eye irritant and excessive exposure might cause liver or kidney problems, according

to the product's safety data sheet. Triclopyr did not cause cancer in laboratory animal studies, although the material contains ethanol, which has been linked to cancer.

Birth defects in humans are declared "unlikely," and in-vitro mutagenicity studies showed negative results for genetic mutation in animals. However, studies of ethanol suggest it has the capacity to induce mutation. The product's bioconcentration potential is low since it is not absorbed by fatty tissues.

Renovate 3's product label and safety data information can be viewed on the Internet (www.sepro.com).