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Environmental groups sue San Francisco over Sharp Park

by Kamala Kelkar

Examiner Staff Writer

Six environmental groups filed a lawsuit against The City on Wednesday alleging that maintenance at Sharp Park Golf Course is responsible for killing endangered and threatened animals.

The Sierra Club, Sequoia Audubon and the nonprofits Wild Equity Institute and Center for Biological Diversity, as well as two other groups have claimed that preserving the course violates the Endangered Species Act by destroying the creatures' natural wetland habitat. Two of the groups initially threatened to sue in September 2008.

To prevent flooding at the golf course, which is owned by San Francisco but is located in Pacifica, The City drains adjacent ponds, which provide habitat for the endangered San Francisco garter snake and threatened red-legged frog. That exposes the frogs' egg masses to air, potentially killing them before they hatch. The garter snake, which preys on the frogs, is threatened by the use of lawn mowers, according to the plaintiffs.

"They don't have permits to harm them," spokesman Jeff Miller for Wild Equity Institute said of city officials.

After the initial notice of intent to sue, Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi wrote legislation in April 2009 requiring the Recreation and Park Department to come up with a plan for restoration.

Half a year later the Rec and Park Commission voted to pursue the cheapest of three proposals, which would keep the 18-hole course but restore the adjacent lagoon and surrounding area, at a cost of between \$5.9 million and \$11.3 million.



Six environmental groups filed a lawsuit claiming that endangered animals living at Sharp Park Golf Course are threatened by maintenance work on the course. (Examiner file photo)

"We're going to continue to pursue the same course," said General Manager Phil Ginsburg.

Commission President Mark Buell shared the sentiment.

"It is what it is. I'm hopeful that we can resolve the matter in a constructive way for all the parties," Buell said.

In the meantime, golfers such as Richard Harris, founder of the San Francisco Public Golf Alliance, say that animals and golf clubs should coexist as the greens are one of only four public courses in San Mateo County.

"We're happy to share the golf course," Harris said. Rec and Park officials said they are still waiting for the results of an environmental impact review — scheduled to be revealed in spring — before moving forward with any changes.