

# Friends of Luscher dump on city plan

**Soil** | "Who knows what's in that muck?" asks a resident about Oswego Lake's floor

By **DANA TIMS**  
THE OREGONIAN

A city of Lake Oswego plan to dump tons of Oswego Lake sediment on a site near Luscher Farm Park, the jewel of Lake Oswego's open spaces, has some residents surprised and concerned about its environmental impact.

The city is considering taking 19,000 cubic yards of sediment, dredged as part of the city's \$100 million sewer construction project underneath Oswego Lake, to city-owned property just east of Luscher Farm. The sediment, to be stored temporarily, would fill a 4-foot-high box the size of a football field.

"With all the pesticides and other things that have run into that lake all these years, who knows what's in that muck?" said Kathe Worsley, a Lake Oswego resident and member of the Friends of Luscher Farm. "It'll be another Love Canal."

Initial testing by a consultant hired by the city indicates that lakebed soils contain measurable amounts of copper, lead, zinc and other substances commonly found in urban



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## Lake Oswego: Hillsboro landfill seen as a backup

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runoff. They also contain petroleum hydrocarbons, which likely come from running gasoline-powered boats on the 415-acre lake.

Whether those levels are high enough to require the dredged material to be declared solid waste — thereby scrubbing the city's plans to place it as "clean fill" near Luscher Farm — is yet to be determined.

Even so, city officials are adamant in saying they would never deposit contaminated material near Luscher Farm or anywhere else.

"I can tell you unequivocally that we would never do that," Mayor Judie Hammerstad said. "Wherever it's stored, it will have been properly analyzed and deemed to be safe for that receiving area."

As for the dredging itself, city officials have no choice but to proceed.

Lake Oswego is in the early stages of complying with a state order to replace an aging sewer line that runs along the bottom of the privately owned lake. Excavating an estimated 19,000 cubic yards of lakebed sediment is necessary so that the new sewer



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**Kathie Worsley, secretary of Friends of Luscher Farm, picks berries on property just east of Luscher Farm where the city is considering dumping tons of dredging sediment from Oswego Lake. The group is concerned about potential environmental impact from the sediment, but city officials say they would ensure the material is safe before they would temporarily store it near the farm.**

er line is placed far enough away from the old line to avoid damaging it during construction.

The excavation is scheduled to begin next winter, when the lake will be drawn down.

City engineers have been looking for a nearby site to temporarily place the soggy dredgings. Disposal sites charge by weight, so it's far cheaper to dry the material and then dump it.

About three weeks ago, Joel Komarek, the city's engineer, talked with parks officials about

where the dredgings could be stored while they dry. Kim Gilmer, head of Lake Oswego Parks & Recreation, told Komarek that a city-owned parcel just east of Luscher Farm might be suitable.

### Out of sight

The site is about one mile south of Oswego Lake and would be out of sight from Luscher Farm, which contains a large community garden and other open-space amenities.

That plan would work, Komarek

said late last week, but only if laboratory tests show that the material is free enough of contaminants to qualify as clean fill.

Preliminary testing on core samples indicates the material may be clean fill, Komarek said. If further testing confirms that, the city would only need Clackamas County approval to deposit the sediments without additional environmental protections.

State Department of Environmental Quality officials, however, say the matter is far from decided.



"The levels of contaminants we're seeing so far are fairly low, but they exceed some of our ecological risk criteria," said Tim Spencer, DEQ's solid waste project manager. "We're just barely into this, though, and it's possible that not all of the material will have to be managed the same way."

Added Spencer, "Any way you look at it, we're not talking about anything like Love Canal."

The worst-case scenario for the city, he said, might entail having to haul the material to a landfill in Hillsboro, equipped with liners and designed to accept industrial wastes and contaminated soils.

### Residents, city spar

Even if the material doesn't end up adjacent to Luscher Farm, Worsley and others are still annoyed. They say the city, perhaps to keep the property next to the farm free for dumping, dragged its feet in approving their wildlife restoration plan for the historic park.

The delays, said Worsley, secretary of the nonprofit Friends of Luscher Farm, ran out the clock on their \$9,100 federal grant application.

City officials say the criticism is unfounded. Far from refusing to talk with Friends of Luscher Farm even once for a full six months — as some group members claim — the city points to a letter parks director Gilmer sent in March to the group.

The letter thanked Friends of Luscher Farm for its efforts, authorized it to begin implementing a pilot project and spelled out details of what needed to happen next to get the rest of the habitat-restoration effort moving.

"We said, 'Here's what we need to make this a successful project,'" said Jane Heisler, a city spokeswoman. "It seems to me that we were very cooperative."

The main snag, said Heisler and Hammerstad, is that the group wanted the city to act as the grantee, meaning it would assume legal liability for all aspects of the restoration effort.

"We're not in a position to do that for anyone," Hammerstad said. "But the bottom line is, we're never going to do anything that endangers Luscher Farm."