

Sunday, April 16, 2006

Cleaning up El Toro

Navy plan to haul away at least 2,000 cubic yards of contaminated earth from two sites wins endorsement from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

By **JEFF ROWE**

The Orange County Register

IRVINE – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is endorsing a Navy plan to remove at least 2,000 cubic yards of earth at the old El Toro base.

The materials are contaminated with luminescent paint, cleaning fluids, pesticides and herbicides. The waste is kept at two sites that were used as storage yards and sludge-drying beds.

The plan still requires the approval of other state and federal agencies. After that a date will be set to begin the work.

The biggest pollution problem at the base remains a pair of solvent plumes, pools of ground water contaminated with cleaning solvent, the legacy of years of cleaning aircraft engines and other equipment during the half-century the base was operating.

"That's the big-ticket item," said Richard Muza, the Environmental Protection Agency specialist working on El Toro's cleanup.

Muza said the EPA expects all El Toro pollution sites to be within compliance by 2010, although removing and treating the tainted ground water is expected to take until 2036. El Toro is a Superfund site, a federal designation conferred on polluted military and industrial sites around the nation.

The Navy has spent about \$191 million cleaning up El Toro and expects to spend an additional \$66 million to finish the job.

El Toro's problems are typical of old military bases and industrial sites where used solvents, dead batteries, dirty oil and other contaminants usually were buried, polluting the soil and ground water.

However, from an environmental perspective, El Toro and the old Tustin airbase are relatively simple cleanups. Other closed bases, such as Mare Island Naval Shipyard in Vallejo, just north of San Francisco, and Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas, were depot-level maintenance sites and face more severe challenges.

As scientists learn more about such sites, they find new threats. Scientists now know, for example, that buried asphalt chunks emit pollutants into the soil. Some asphalt is buried at El Toro; how those sites will be treated hasn't yet been determined.

Barring an unexpected pollution find however, Great Park Corporation executives expect construction to proceed as planned.

The Great Park will include wilderness areas, athletic fields, museums, an amphitheater, farm, botanical garden, schools, shops and housing.

Demolition of the runways is expected to begin by mid-May; construction of the first parts of the Great Park is expected to begin by early 2008.

Friday, April 14, 2006

An early Great Park vision unveiled

Botanic gardens, bridges, other elements emerge on plan for old El Toro base.

By **JEFF ROWE and SONYA SMITH**

The Orange County Register

A 92-acre botanical garden, a 10,000-seat amphitheater, bridges over the canyon and balloons that could carry people aloft will be part of the Great Park in plans presented Thursday to the Great Park Corp. board by designer Ken Smith.

As Smith's plans take shape, so does his vision of the park as a place of scientific and artistic exploration, constant themes in his 53-page update.

The plan that won Smith the design contract showed general areas: wildlife corridor, athletic fields, farm, museums, golf course and education center.

The specifics will emerge as Smith and his team labor to create a detailed plan for the old air base.

Perhaps most intriguing are the botanical gardens, envisioned in Smith's plan as "meshing of native habitats, horticultural displays and striking new structures to house the garden's collections."

Among the possibilities Smith envisions:

Plantings of foods eaten by American Indians.

Demonstration plantings showing current scientific research.

A green waste recycling operation where compost is used elsewhere in the park.

As examples of what the botanical gardens could become, Smith references gardens in La Cañada Flintridge, Santa Barbara and Cape Town, South Africa.

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