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State Senate Leader Don Perata (D-Oakland) and Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger are determined to place a multi-billion-dollar water bond issue on the Feb. 5 presidential primary ballot. But they're up against an Oct. 16 secretary of state's deadline for working out a legislative deal.

It's not clear what their rush is. There also will be two other statewide elections next year, in June and November.

"We don't do our best work when we're rushed," says Assemblywoman Lois Wolk (D-Davis), who heads the Assembly water committee. "If we're going to ask the people of California to invest money, we ought to make certain it's a good investment."

"I'm very skeptical we can do this in the next week. Perhaps we could do it in a couple of months."

However, water is such a contentious issue — fought over by fiercely competing, righteous interests and regulated by turf-protecting government entities — that maybe Capitol politicians should be encouraged to agree on whatever they can, even if it means taking only an incremental step toward fixing the fragile state water system.

[See Skelton, Page B6]



ROBERT DURELL Los Angeles Times

ON THE TRAIL: Agricultural engineer Robert Beggs made an odor dictionary and uses an olfactometer, resembling a radar gun for smells, to find the source of Woodland's trouble.

Town gets its noses out of joint

Woodland, Calif., is plagued by foul smells. The periodic stench has officials turning to an odor hotline and the Nasal Ranger.

By JOHN M. GLIONNA
Times Staff Writer

WOODLAND, Calif. — This town stinks. The mayor has been sniffing around for a solution. The local newspaper editor has also nosed about. An expert briefly brought in a scent-detecting device straight out of an old "Star Trek" episode.

But nobody has solved the mysterious odor problem.

Some nights, when the wind blows just so, various stench wafts across residential areas,

causing folks to hold their noses and run for the phone.

So many complained that Woodland created a 24-hour odor hotline. One caller said the aroma smelled like rotting feet. Another said it was more like sweaty socks or "horrible tennis shoes." Still another likened it to "a wet dog rolling in manure."

"It's horrible," said resident Tim Bair. "It's like driving by a cattle feed lot, sniffing the ocean at low tide and standing on an open sewage hole, all rolled into one."

This Sacramento bedroom community of 52,000 residents, where farmers' fields meet newly built subdivisions, is like many places nationwide where urban growth has brought complications to areas once strictly devoted to agriculture.

Woodland is trying to collect enough clues [See Stench, Page B6]

state of Oregon in a 1970 incident still kept pungently alive on the Internet and in columns by humorist Dave Barry.

An undisputed environmental tragedy, the recent deaths of three blue whales off Southern California also posed a problem for communities faced with disposing of 60 or 70 tons of decomposing cetacean that had rolled into their beaches and harbors.

The difficulties, all too well known to whale researchers, are wryly summed up by the authors of the 2005 edition of "Marine Mammals Ashore: A Field Guide for Strandings."

"The simplest way for a carcass to disappear is to turn your back on it and walk away," advise scientists Joseph R. Geraci and [See Whales, Page B8]

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Q & A

Planner Jaime Lerner says a city can boost its quality of life quickly with a "shared dream." **B2**

Sheriff weighs merger

Lee Baca assigns a team to explore taking over the Office of Public Safety. **B3**

Al Martinez

Leaving the house at the magical moment between dark and light is nearly a mystical event. **B3**

Honoring an icon

Virginia Watson, "Ms. Chatsworth," is recognized at the city's Pioneer Day Festival. **B3**

Dreams into nightmares

Alleged predatory lending often leads to higher payments and foreclosure. **B4**

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Northern California town fails the smell test

[Stench, from Page B1]

to help a consultant — a sort of smell detective — create an odor map that would plot the most noxious locations and help pinpoint the source or sources of the smells.

Possible culprits, alone or combined, include fields of hay, rice and alfalfa, a tomato cannery, a wastewater treatment plant, a biomass center that turns wood waste and fruit pits into energy — even the local animal shelter. Or maybe, a resident suggested, somebody is spreading too much chicken manure on the tomato plants.

So far, the town has learned this: Odor identification is a funny, inexact field. While they know that wind-borne odors can travel for many miles, they don't know if they're dealing with one smell from a single source or a variety of smells from different places — a sort of cocktail of bad odors.

Officials quickly decided that, though colorful, the descriptions used by hotline callers needed refinement. So they devised their own smell vocabulary, urging callers in a recorded message to use words such as "musty," "pungent," "compost-like," "swampy" or "smelling like wet hay." To help with the odor map, callers are also asked to be specific — noting the time, place and wind direction when the smell was detected.

Two dozen people have called the hotline since August. "We're hoping this doesn't turn into a mob hysteria," said Gary Wegener, director of public works. "Once you start talking about smells, the more people start sniffing around and saying, 'Well, gee, now that you mention it, that is an odor.'"

Woodland's most noxious smells are elusive and often



ROBERT DURELL *Los Angeles Times*

SEARCH FOR A SMELL: Several suspected sources of the smells that irritate Woodland, Calif., residents, such as the fields where a local tomato processing plant dumps wastewater, left, have been under surveillance by the Nasal Ranger, a device used to locate odors.

short-lived.

The mayor drove around town and said he smelled something bad. That's when Jim Smith got involved. "Our mayor says it's something putrid and rather rancid," said Smith, editor of the local Daily Democrat newspaper. "So I went out with my nose to the air, but I couldn't find it. When I drive by the local cannery, it's always smelled pretty good to me. I can see the steam coming off the tower. It's always smelled like tomato sauce, and that's not bad."

Air quality specialist Dave Smith considers himself somewhat of a smell expert. But even he is baffled by some of the reports to the hotline.

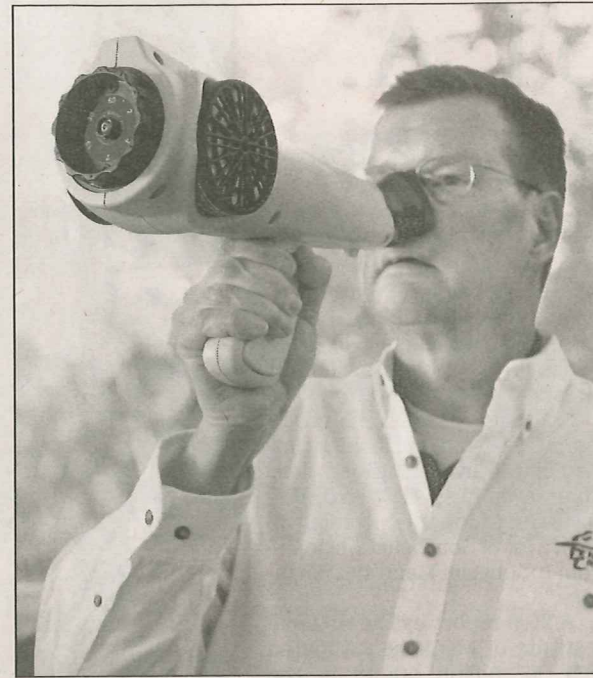
"The thing with odors is that nobody agrees on them," said

Smith, a supervisor at the Yolo-Solano Air Quality Management District. "It's all in the nose of the beholder. At the cannery, some people kind of enjoy a whiff of tomato soup, but others don't like it. These odors are worse. It's a rotten smell you wouldn't want in your home at night."

Mayor David M. Flory is tired of theories. He wants answers.

"I just can't understand why we can't identify this. We've got a laboratory and environmental engineers who should be able to tell us what is responsible for this," he said.

Flory said a bad smell a decade ago was pinpointed to a sugar beet factory that has since closed. At one City Council meeting back then, residents wore gas masks.



This year, the smell complaints spiked in August. The city and Pacific Coast Producers brought in agricultural engineer Robert Beggs.

One day, Loida Osoteo, the city's environmental services manager who monitors the hotline, called Beggs to notify him of several new complaints.

"What did they say it smelled like, vinegar or hay or what?" Beggs asked.

"Oh, I don't know, we never asked," she said. "People just said it stinks."

That's when Beggs created Woodland's odor dictionary. He also made what he called the "odor circuit," visiting problem spots with a high-tech device called a field olfactometer. The device, whose brand name is Nasal Ranger, resembles a police radar gun that is held up to the nose.

"It's kind of goofy-looking," Beggs said.

"He looked like he was from outer space," Osoteo added.

The Nasal Ranger, which quantifies odor strength, gave readings of 30 in some areas. Beggs said a person would gag at a reading of 50 or higher.

Beggs hopes to have his map completed by next month. Recently, he drove out to the fields where the cannery disposes of its water. "Windows up," he warned. "There's some solids here."

Standing in one vacant field, he used something akin to a wine connoisseur's lexicon to describe the odor: "It's pungent, a combination of musty with a little compost."

Tim Bair doesn't care what you call it. He's just hungry for an answer. Said the 53-year-old retired truck driver: "The smell just takes your appetite away."

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The mayor knows everyone is working hard for an answer but says that the repeated failure to identify a definitive source just isn't acceptable. "Staff memos are full of speculation," he said. "This just doesn't pass the smell test."

In August, the air quality board investigated the Pacific Coast Producers plant, which company officials call the world's largest canned tomato products facility. An inspector visited the fields where the firm spreads leftovers from tomato cleaning, including muddy water, tomato juice and salts. He detected some objectionable odors and cited the cannery for creating a public nuisance.

Pacific Coast Producers is working with the city to find the

source of the problem. Mona Shulman, the company's general counsel, said the cannery has been in Woodland for half a century. The factory, in fact, is reviewing its manufacturing processes. But Shulman said the sooner the source of the smells is found, the sooner the company can stop working to defend itself against accusations of odors for which it may not be responsible.

Woodland has created a calendar of when to expect certain odors. In the spring, there's rotting algae at both the wastewater plant and storm water ponds. Summer and fall is harvest season for all kinds of local agriculture, including tomatoes. The cannery runs roughly 70 days each summer, July through September, officials say.