AB 707 – Blue Ribbon Committee for the Rehabilitation of Clear Lake

SUMMARY

AB 707 would establish a Blue Ribbon Committee for the Rehabilitation of Clear Lake, housed within the Natural Resources Agency. By working towards improving the environmental quality of the lake, this bill will benefit Lake County as a first step in helping the local economy through promoting tourism and job creation.

Clear Lake is in Lake County, and has been determined to be an environmental hazard by several state agencies, including the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment and the State Water Resources Control Board. The fish are too toxic for consumption due to the high levels of mercury in the water, and cyanobacteria blooms on the water's surface produce an unpleasant odor and excrete scum that is unsafe to swim in. The water quality of the lake negatively impacts local tourism, which hinders the economic vitality of the surrounding community.

BACKGROUND

Clear Lake is the oldest species rich, warm water, natural lake in North America. The lake contributes to the surrounding ecosystems of plants and animals, and is home to endangered and rare animal species, such as tule elk, and the Clear Lake hitch. Often called the "The Bass Capital of the West," Clear Lake was once a major bass fishing and boating destination.

Data collected from the U.S. Census Bureau finds that Lake County is amongst the poorest counties in California, growing at a much slower economic rate than the majority of the state. According to the 2016 *Lake County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy*, Clear Lake is one of the top two contributors to the local economy, cited as "the cornerstone of the local visitor and recreation markets."

However, Clear Lake suffers from numerous environmental hazards that negatively affect the water and aquatic life. Due to pollution from a closed mine, the State Water Resources Control Board has determined that the water contains above average levels of mercury. The unnaturally high levels of mercury contaminate the fish, making them unsafe to eat for women and children.

The overgrowth of seasonal algae, cyanobacteria, and aquatic weeds in the lake, cause a variety of health and habitat problems. The abundance of algae and cyanobacteria blooms create surface scum, which results in water that is not safe to swim in for humans or dogs. The scum on the water also creates a sulfur-like odor and adds unnatural coloring to the surface of the lake. These factors have been major contributors to the recent decrease in local tourism.

THIS BILL

AB 707 establishes a Blue Ribbon Committee for the rehabilitation of Clear Lake. The Committee will consist of one representative from:

- UC Davis;
- The County of Lake;
- Local tribes impacted by the lake;
- The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board;
- The Natural Resources Agency; and,
- Local experts in economic development, agriculture, and the environment.

The Committee will meet quarterly, with at least two meetings per year held in Lake County. Beginning January 1, 2019, the Committee will be required to submit an annual report to the Governor and the appropriate policy committees of the Legislature that identifies barriers and contributing factors to the poor water quality, strategies to improve the water, and the threats to wildlife. The report will also include recommendations, estimates of cost, and a plan for coordinating with local, state, and federal governments to secure funding for implementation of restoration activities.

The Blue Ribbon Committee will spearhead activities aimed at cleaning up Clear Lake for environmental gains, so that it may have greater recreational usage and entice new economic development.

SUPPORT

- Moke Simon, Lake County Supervisor, District 1
- Jeff Smith, Lake County Supervisor, District 2
- Jim Steele, Lake County Supervisor, District 3
- Tina Scott, Lake County Supervisor, District 4
- Rob Brown, Lake County Supervisor, District 5
- Middletown Rancheria of Pomo Indians
- Habematolel Pomo of Upper Lake Tribe
- Scotts Valley Band of Pomo Indians
- Lake County Land Trust
- Chi Council for the Clear Lake Hitch
- Northern California Power Agency (NCPA)
- Sierra Club California
- City of Lakeport

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