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Opponents of spraying marsh reeds rally today

By RICHARD DEGENER Staff Writer, (609) 463-6711, [E-Mail](#)

LOWER TOWNSHIP - Opponents of a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers plan to kill marsh reeds with herbicides here at the South Cape May Meadows tract are holding a rally today at Cape May Point State Park.

Organizers of the rally hope to stop the spraying of glyphosate-based herbicides scheduled to begin as soon as next week. The rally is set for 11 a.m. today at the park pavilion near the Cape May Lighthouse.

"We've got to get on with halting the poison. It has ill effects on people and wildlife," said Ruth Fisher, an environmental activist from Dennis Township organizing the rally.

The Army Corps, which plans to spray 57 acres this year and another 43 acres in 2005 in the wetlands between Cape May and Cape May Point, maintains the herbicide application will be safe and will not hurt people or wildlife. The Army Corps hopes to kill the invasive marsh reed as part of a larger project to restore beaches and wetlands ecosystems in the area.

Questions about the spraying have divided many groups. The state Division of Fish and Wildlife, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Cape May Point State Park, and The Nature Conservancy all support the project.

The Cape May Point Environmental Commission supports it, while the Cape May City Environmental Commission and West Cape May Environmental Commission support the project but not the aerial spraying. The New Jersey Audubon Society recently released a policy statement questioning whether there are enough safeguards for flora and fauna in the area.

"We remain unconvinced that this project includes sufficient wildlife safeguards, monitoring requirements, and evaluation parameters," the paper states.

Concern about the spraying has also been registered by Lincoln Brower, a biologist at Sweet Brier College in Virginia, and Karen Oberhauser, a biologist at the University of Minnesota. Brower and Oberhauser study monarch butterflies and are in their 13th year collecting data in the area. In the joint press release, the scientists said the spraying could destroy the study.

"The continuity of this study is critical to the scientific data base for this species. The monarch population in Eastern North America is at an all-time low this summer, and if the area in Cape May is sprayed, the integrity of the study of their current fall migration will be jeopardized," they wrote.

Fisher, who has been organizing the rally with Cape May resident Barbara Skinner, said the New Jersey Environmental Federation and Clean Ocean Action also oppose the spraying.

Fisher, pointing to chemical applications on phragmites at Fishing Creek, argues that



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the herbicides will not do the job and the government has not done enough testing to prove there are no long-range impacts on people and wildlife.

Cape May Point Mayor Malcolm Fraser is a strong supporter of the project but was out of town Tuesday. West Cape May Mayor Robert Jackson said he is satisfied that the application rate will not create any health impacts. Jackson said the Army Corps already met the borough's concerns about making sure school children were not in the area during the spraying and that none of the chemicals would drift.

Jackson, however, also noted he has no problem with his town's Environmental Commission taking a stance against the herbicide application.

A commission resolution said the reed could re-colonize anyway and the spraying period is when millions of birds, butterflies, damselflies and dragonflies migrate through the area.

To e-mail Richard Degener at The Press:

RDegener@pressofac.com

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