

Davis Seeks \$100 Million to Guard Beaches From Runoff

He also wants
\$162 million to
start UC Merced

By Greg Lucas

SACRAMENTO BUREAU CHIEF

SACRAMENTO — The Davis administration wants to spend \$100 million to help reduce pollution-laced runoff that has brought a rash of beach closures along California's 1,100 mile coastline, senior administration sources said yesterday.

In the second of a series of carefully choreographed news leaks aimed at showcasing selected parts of the Democratic governor's budget, Davis has also earmarked \$162.4 million for initial construction of a new University of California campus in Merced — even though UC hasn't settled on a site.

Environmentalists hailed the beach anti-pollution plan, calling it a major investment that would help curb a vexing problem.

"Runoff is the No. 1 pollutant to the San Francisco Bay, in fact, to all our coastal waters," said Ann Notthoff of the Natural Resources De-

fense Council in San Francisco. "This will help do more to prevent pollution from reaching the ocean in the first place."

The defense council has for 10 years released surveys detailing the number of beach closings in the Golden State. There were more than 5,000 closures in 1998, most of them in Southern California but a good number of them in Northern California.

Among them were 117 closures in San Francisco, including shutdowns at Baker Beach, Ocean Beach and Aquatic Park. San Mateo County had 221 closures in 1998, some of them at Pescadero and San Gregorio beaches.

The number of closures statewide dropped to 3,547 in 1999, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council, but their severity increased. Huntington Beach (Orange County), for example, saw its beach closed for most of the year.

San Francisco had only eight closures and San Mateo 94 in 1999.

Authorities close beaches when pollutants in the water exceed levels set by the state. Many closures are prompted by sewage spills, but storm runoff — particularly in urban

areas — can wash any number of pollutants into the ocean. Among them are pesticides, fertilizers, animal waste, oil and automotive fluids.

The Davis administration's plan would set aside \$70 million to help local governments create systems to prevent contaminated water from reaching the ocean.

Among the proposals Sacramento would help finance are the creation of catch basins to grab the first rainfall of each storm — in which a lot of the pollutants are concentrated — and allow it to filter into the ground instead of washing down storm drains.

The administration is earmarking money for areas that have seen the most beach closures. That means the bulk of the funding would probably go to Southern California, which has seen beaches shut down from Santa Barbara to Ventura and Santa Monica to San Diego.

An additional \$20 million would be devoted to helping communities find the sources of contamination. One reason the Huntington Beach closure dragged on was that scientists couldn't pinpoint where the pollutants came from.

The final \$10 million would help

acquire wetlands, which could be used as natural filters to stem the flow of pollutants into the sea.

The UC Merced funding was part of a package of budget goodies Davis doled out to the Central Valley, a region that was key to Davis' 1998 gubernatorial victory.

A big advocate of the new UC campus, Davis already has earmarked money in past budgets to begin planning and developing the site. But the \$162.4 million set aside in the governor's latest spending plan is his biggest commitment yet.

That money would pay for construction of the campus' core buildings, including a library and science labs. The only question is exactly where those building will be erected.

Environmental concerns have already led UC to back off its original site amid fears that tests and environmental impact studies will delay its opening, planned for fall, 2004.

Now UC wants to raze a nearby golf course and build the center of its campus there. But environmentalists have criticized that plan as a way to avoid a thorough study of the campus' impact on the surrounding area.

"We are, as a campus, deeply committed to environmental responsibility," Chancellor Carol Tomlinson-Keasey said in a statement thanking Davis for the construction money.

"We are continuing our efforts to

carefully place the campus in the Merced area in a way that respects the surrounding environmental habitat."

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