

Let it Flow.

Comments by Virginia Strom-Martin, 1/22/04, Guerneville

Thank you, Supervisor Reilly, for being accessible and accountable to your constituents. I only wish the other Water Agency Board members were here to listen and learn from their constituents. Watersheds know no political boundaries and the Russian River is the living system on which we all depend.

Thank you to Steve Fogle and the excellent Chamber staff for organizing Forum and spreading the word. What a great turnout!

The issue before us is a tough one: How does the SCWA balance the needs of its contracting communities, agriculture and several stressed (threatened) fish species? Water is a limited resource with multiple uses. The lower Russian depends on steady flows for recreation and tourism: it is the lifeblood of our economy.

Tonight we are here because of the listing of three species of threatened fish. The report you have heard is supposed to be helpful to the fish. The solution proposed would, amazingly, reduce the flows in the lower river by 70% over a period of 4 months during the hottest season of the year. As a former Chair of the Legislative Fisheries Committee, I had the opportunity over 6 years to work with fishermen and biologists throughout California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Alaska. One thing I learned was that adequate coldwater flow regimes are one of MANY factors that are required for species recovery.

If we lower flows and don't improve the many other elements necessary to their survival, then we will have a collapse of the system.

Case in point is the Klamath debacle which occurred in the month of Sept. 2002. Low flows controlled by the Bureau of Reclamation precipitated the die-off of 33,000 adult Chinook Salmon and at least 100 Coho. A state study verified the main cause for the deaths was the 25% diversion of water from the lower Klamath.

Lowering the flows on the Russian would benefit the fish?

We have already manipulated the system to its detriment: Barriers to migration, polluted run-off and degraded habitat have resulted in declining salmonid populations in the Russian River and its many tributaries. Lowering water levels without addressing WATER QUALITY is short-sighted. The fish are our canary in the coal mine. Healthy fish runs are a sign of improved water quality for fish AND people.

We have delegated the responsibility of protecting and maintaining a healthy river system to our BOS aka The Water Agency Board. The question is...should a river be managed as a collection of extractable resources or as a dynamic ecosystem?

The BOS/Water Agency Board, has spent 100's of thousands, if not millions of dollars lobbying for federal and state Salmon habitat restoration funds and they have been

successful. They have spent millions of dollars of rate payer money on creek restoration projects to help bring back the salmon and steelhead populations. \$300M in restoration funds have been pledged over the next 10 years. But that investment will be wasted if this EXPERIMENT doesn't work.

Someone said that the Russian River water is already over-appropriated. I believe that's the real reason why low flows are now being recommended. Where will the water go that once went in the Russian? Will it be sold to contractors upstream?

The Agency MUST meet future growth, but the answer is not denying the fish water and west county its economy. The Russian River is an internationally recognized tourist and recreation area. Low flows in the summer (peak tourist season) would devastate the local businesses and make a mockery of the redevelopment dollars that the BOS approved. Low flows would also have a negative impact on ground water and wells in the area.

Instead of low flow let's have more conservation, recycling of waste water and water efficiency projects. In 1999 the Agency adopted a Water Conservation plan with the goal of saving 6,600 af per year. \$15M was appropriated for it. Free showerheads, retrofitting 33,000 lo-flo toilets and rebates for water efficient washers(one can save 7,000 gals. per year using the new water efficient clothes washers) are great but that's just the tip of the iceberg.

As of 2001, Santa Rosa's conservation program cut water use by 8%: a great start but they can do better. Rohnert Park is, just now, in the process of household metering. Its aquifer is being depleted faster than it's being replenished.

Many river residents pay dearly for their water. Duncans Mills and Jenner have had water trucked in during the drought years of the 70's. The point is: we're all in this together and EVERY resident in the county should be actively conserving water.

The Agency has a centralized staff with expertise in new and innovative technologies and cost-effective water conservation practices. Successful conservation could, in fact, reduce the amount of water drained from the RUSSIAN RIVER. This idea is no longer an option...it's a necessity.

The first listing of endangered fish was in 1997.....7 years ago. A Press Democrat editorial at the time urged the Agency to be proactive and "EXPAND THE USE OF TREATED WASTE WATER". Recycled water is simply "too valuable to flush down a river" the article said. West county residents have come up with a number of creative uses for waste water. GRATON IS GROWING A FOREST WITH TREATED WASTEWATER! Many of us have gray water systems in our homes and conserve water like crazy since it is so expensive.

I'd like the BOS aka Water Agency Board to go back to the drawing board and get serious about water re-use and conservation incentives. Millions of gallons of wastewater

could provide beneficial uses to agriculture and urban reuse that would otherwise be diverted from the river. I believe it can be done. We can and should live within our means.