

## **Article for Sonoma West County Gazette**

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### **Santa Rosa Hearing on River Discharge**

On Thursday, April 3, 2008, about 75 people attended the City of Santa Rosa's only hearing on their direct river discharge project-environmental impact report (EIR). About 25 people spoke. Since the document is over 5000 pages and highly complex, most pleaded with City officials to expand the public comment period by 30 days and to hold another hearing closer to the end of the comment period.

The Santa Rosa Board of Public Utilities gave no response and left everyone with the impression that their pleas fell on deaf ears. Consultants emphasized that the comment period is 9 days more than the minimum required by law (45 days), and ends on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2008. This was hardly assuring since the City could have expanded the comment period by two or three months if they were so inclined.

City officials appear to be rushing this process to prevent thorough examination of the complex scientific studies that accompany the project description. Prior to their release of this three volume EIR, they released three other large volumes of tech memos last January. If you want to read all these pages, you have to either download them from the website, get the compact disk and read them on a computer screen, or pay \$324 for the three-volume EIR (three volumes of tech memos probably run a similar price). At another meeting I heard one decision maker remark that they wanted to make this document litigation proof. That explains the great length and complexity and the minimal time period for review.

All of this is for a project they don't really need. While it's true that some of the components are necessary to meet State discharge requirements, this whole project process is overkill. The river outfall pipes are oversized, the capacity goes way beyond what they need for the General Plan 2020 projections, and once certified, the project can sit there for years and be utilized far down the line when we have lost track of what they are doing.

The project provides capacity for up to 26 million gallons a day (mgd) dry weather flow. Today they generate about 16.5 mgd, which is about what they generated in 1992. They are currently rated to go up to 21.3 mgd. There is hardly any rush to get this extra capacity on line. This last year they discharged a tiny fraction of what was discharged right before the Geysers Pipeline was up and running, and now the Geyser's flows will be greatly increased due to a new contract. Furthermore, the City of Rohnert Park recently asked for a cut back in their current capacity.

Two alternatives, containing numerous components, are analyzed in great detail, the third is the “no project” alternative, required by law. The two developed alternatives include upgrading their existing Laguna discharge system to meet more stringent regulations. The other project seeks one of three direct discharge outfalls on the Russian River (two near Healdsburg and one at Steelhead Beach in Forestville). The only county daily newspaper noted in their article after the meeting that no speakers opposed the preferred Laguna discharge option. What they did not print was that most supported such discharges ONLY if they were more highly treated utilizing advanced membrane technology, which takes out far more contaminants than their current system.

Recent news reports, based on an Associated Press nationwide study, indicate that pharmaceuticals, endocrine disruptors, and personal care product chemicals are getting into our drinking water supply. These substances are known to cause serious health problems for humans, aquatic life and other wildlife. Two articles ran on March 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> in the Press Democrat detailing the study’s findings and were entitled, *“Trace amounts of drugs found in cities’ water”* and *“Drug residue tainting fish: Traces of pharmaceuticals seep into water sources, harm animals, evidence shows.”*

The City should either adopt a zero discharge alternative OR assure that advanced membrane treatment with osmosis, or some comparable technology, will be utilized for all wastewater that is either irrigated or discharged. Minimal river or Laguna discharges could be supported provided advanced technology was used to remove nutrients and chemicals before discharge.

There are only 126 chemicals regulated in wastewater through the California Toxics Rule, but there are about 80,000 chemicals in production, and no one knows how they interact with all their various combinations. Once these chemicals pervade our waterways, they would be very difficult to get out and may kill aquatic life in the process and ultimately would affect human life as well.

Brenda Adelman can be reached through Russian River Watershed Protection Committee at [rrwpc-1@comcast.net](mailto:rrwpc-1@comcast.net) We have a target letter available to send to City officials. Just send us an email asking for “target letter” and we will send you a copy you can sign and send in.