

July, 2008

Dear Russian River Supporter:

The Russian River's running very low.....

Have you been to the river this summer? We visited Steelhead Beach recently (in Forestville) and watched a medium-sized dog standing in the middle of the river with the water coming only to his shoulders. That was in late June, when flows are generally much higher than in late summer. Between June 15th and July 3rd, 2008, flows at the Hacienda Bridge averaged about 125 cubic feet per second (cfs), which is the minimum required. (Average June flows for the last 45 years was 315 cfs, with 23 cfs the lowest average flow occurring in draught year 1977 and 1,418 cfs the highest in 1998.) In this very hot summer, we wonder if flows will go much lower during the recreation season?

The Sonoma County Water Agency recently held public meetings at three locations to explain this situation. Unfortunately, only about ten people attended the Guerneville meeting. Pam Jeane, Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA) Deputy Chief Engineer of Water Operations, explained, *"The dry weather, coupled with reductions in diversions from the Potter Valley Project, means we are experiencing a water supply situation very similar to last year. The Agency's goal is to save 12,000-15,000 acre-feet in Lake Mendocino by the end of October, 2008. Water supply projections show water levels in Lake Mendocino falling to about 20,000 acre-feet by early fall, a time when the Agency would like to see at least 30,000 acre-feet in Lake Mendocino to release into the upper Russian River for three species listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act."* (Steelhead, Coho salmon and Chinook salmon)

At the meeting, SCWA staff further described the complexity of the situation. It is always difficult to encapsulate complicated issues into a "nutshell", but we have limited space and need to try. Here are some of the major components of this very complicated issue. If something is unclear, it may be a result of our abbreviated explanation. Please email any questions to us at rrwpc-1@comcast.net and we will do our best to respond.

Complicated Russian River water delivery system....

Russian River summer flows come basically from two places: Lake Mendocino where most of the summer water is a result of Eel River diversions. In order to protect that river system, flows have recently been cut back by about one third. Lake Sonoma is the other source. There is plenty of water in Lake Sonoma to serve all needs, but there is no way yet to access all that is needed, since flow restrictions have been required by the National Marine Fisheries Service. Higher flows in Dry Creek disturb the reproductive requirements of the endangered species; they also cause a great deal of erosion and habitat disturbance needed for the species to survive, therefore flows are limited to 90 cfs in Dry Creek (different from Hacienda which is 125 cfs in a normal rain year).

SCWA spent many years preparing a Biological Assessment to describe and address the impacts of their facilities on the endangered fish species. This was submitted to the National Marine Fisheries Service about two years ago. It has been in review and SCWA is waiting for the Agency's release of the Biological Opinion, which will address

the issues in the Assessment and tell SCWA what they can and cannot do and what operational changes need to be implemented.

In the meantime, the Sonoma County General Plan Water Element will probably be approved by the Board of Supervisors later this year. There are goals and policies proposed in that document that affect water use in our County. SCWA was scheduled to release on Environmental Impact Report (EIR) on their long-range water diversions on June 24 2008. The EIR would have proposed alternatives for accessing Lake Sonoma water, but the Board of Supervisors decided to hold back release of the document until later this year, after the Biological Opinion is released and the General Plan approved.

We don't know anyone familiar with the contents of either the EIR or the Biological Opinion who can talk about it. That will have to wait for another day. (At issue is the use of the rubber dam for holding back flows and the ability to get adequate water from Lake Sonoma with limited flows. It is very possible that a very expensive and contentious pipeline down Dry Creek will need to be built to access that water.)

SCWA also wants increased water rights....

In the meantime, SCWA has been trying to get rights to increased water diversions since 1993. Their long-term goal has been to go from 75,000 acre-feet per year to 101,000 acre-feet. This water serves Marin and Sonoma County urban areas having about 600,000 people. As part of the permit process, the contractors have been required to demonstrate extensive conservation practices and they have been somewhat successful in cutting use. Of course, many of the cities are accomplishing this by increasing the use of their local groundwater supplies, which is not a sustainable practice. There was a successful lawsuit by people in the Pengrove area accusing Rohnert Park of drawing down the aquifer and greatly impacting the wells of local property owners.

Furthermore, to complicate things further, RRWPC is one of 16 groups litigating the Agency's Urban Water Management Plan, which designates how much water will be needed by each contractor and how they will meet conservation goals, among other things. That suit is pending and could throw a big monkey wrench into the Agency's plans. We will continue this never-ending water saga in future mailers.

Two important announcements....

Western Sonoma County Rural Alliance, generous supporters of RRWPC for many years, is holding their big fundraiser on Sunday, August 3rd, from 2:30 to 6 PM. It will take place in a lovely garden on Bodega Highway near the town of Freestone. The charge is \$45 per person. Please call Dian Hardy at (707) 829-3987 if you wish to attend or contact her at tacitus@sonic.net Dian can give you more information about the event.

Jane Nielson and Howard Wiltshire are two incredible geologists who have about 50 years between them working for the United States Geological Service. Jane and Howard live in the West Sebastopol area and have been an enormous help to all of the environmentalists in West County working on water issues. They have submitted many commentaries on projects at our request and we are very grateful for their assistance.

The title of their recently released book is: "The American West at Risk: Science, Myths, and Politics of Land Abuse and Recovery" along with co-author Richard W. Hazlett.

For detailed chapter descriptions, author information, additional topics, alphabetic references, color photos, and links to related sites, please see: www.losingthewest.com
The book costs \$35 and is published by Oxford University Press. It is over 500 pages and filled with fascinating information about many of the ways humans have negatively impacted the West and how they can repair the damage from past resource abuse.

RRWPC needs your help!

RRWPC has been getting terrific responses from our supporters, but it's still not quite enough to cover our expenses. About one third of you have not donated in over a year or more. We hope to hear from you soon since we will need to shorten our list in a few months to cut costs. The date next to your name represents your most recent donation according to our records. Remember, we do not sell or loan our list to anyone. Please give as generously as you can. Thank you!

