

July, 2009

Dear Russian River Supporter:

A Temporary Reprieve....

We have positive news to report thus far this summer, although it's still fairly early. As you recall from our last mailer, Russian River flows were scheduled to go down as low as 35 cubic feet per second (cfs) after July 6th. In fact, they were supposed to go down to 85 cfs between June 15th and July 6th. Those levels haven't materialized yet. We have had few extended hot spells this season and Lake Mendocino storage levels have remained fairly constant, but there are signs that lower flows may be on the way, and we just have to wait and see what will happen.

Last February, when the County Water Agency first proposed greatly lowering summer flows, Lake Mendocino contained about 50,000 acre feet less than in 2008. By comparison, Lake Mendocino levels are now only about 8,000 feet lower than this time last year. (326,000 gallons equals one acre foot). We are hoping that if we don't get any major heat waves, Lake Mendocino can be managed to preserve the whole lower river recreation season, which needs at least 100 cfs to keep the canoes and kayaks moving. Thus far this season (as of July 14th), levels have not gone below 100 cfs. The Water Agency is currently raising the rubber dam however, to provide more supplies to their water contractors, and this may trigger a decrease in downstream flows.

Photo project going well....

The process to change Decision 1610, State Law governing flows in the Russian River will begin next year. Even if recreational flows were maintained this year at 100 cfs, there is no guarantee they won't be permanently lowered after the State considers and rules on this change. We will probably have to fight hard to maintain these levels. We have attended every major water meeting this year and have repeatedly called attention to the needs of the lower river. We hope they are starting to hear us. **We urge you to mail off the target letter in this mailer to voice your concerns to the State Water Board.**

RRWPC has developed a photo project to document conditions in the Russian River this summer. We want to be able to show impacts on recreation and water quality when flows are substantially reduced. Also we are closely tracking the water quality monitoring conducted this summer on conventional pollutants, such as bacteria, nutrients, temperature and some others. We are noticing that temperatures are too high for cold water fish, bacteria has been too high on numerous occasions, turbidity (cloudiness) of the water is sometimes a little high, but the other readings seem normal.

Water quality tests for bacteria have caused the occasional posting of warning signs advising people to swim at their own risk at Johnson's and Monte Rio Beaches. But bacteria data is fickle and can be high one day and normal the next. None of the signs stayed up very long. People who have health issues should probably stay out of the

water or find a remote beach somewhere where contamination is less likely to occur. If you are healthy, you probably don't have to worry much.

We are very concerned about algae mats in the river and bright green *Ludwegia* growing from the bank. We are especially worried about what will happen if the weather heats up and the river goes down. The nutrients and invasive plants are likely to proliferate. This is one of the main reasons the lower river cannot sustain lowered flows. We are aiming to document this with photographs over the entire summer.

If any of you have a digital camera and would like to help, please send us pictures. Photos must be dated and we need a description of where they were taken. You can email them to: rrwpc@comcast.net

Basin Plan Amendment coming up....

On July 23rd, just about the time you are receiving this mailer, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board) will be considering a Basin Plan Amendment that would legalize "incidental runoff" for the first time. Until now, summer wastewater irrigation runoff has been illegal, even though it frequently occurs.

Our major concern about the proposed Amendment is that it fails to account for problems that include unregulated and untreated chemicals in the wastewater such as pharmaceuticals, personal care products, cancer causing agents, anti-bacterial chemicals that destroy our ability to fight infections, endocrine disruptors that cause sex reversals in wildlife and other problems, and much more. Also, runoff can carry toxic pesticides and fertilizers from lawns into our river along with the wastewater at a time when very low flows can't assimilate the toxins. **(Please send in target letter!)**

Prioritize strict conservation over wastewater discharges....

There are huge advantages to doing everything technically feasible to save fresh water resources before allowing the use of partially treated wastewater to legally enter our river. It is far safer, cheaper, energy independent, and sustainable to use our fresh water much more frugally and not generate waste in the first place, than to look to treated sewage reuse to sustain our natural supplies. RRWPC does not oppose all reuse; we just think people should be aware of the many untreated chemical toxins going down our drains and the difficulty in treating them all. This is a public health issue thus far not adequately addressed. Drought resistant landscapes can save a lot of water, but there is little motivation to install them if wastewater is readily available for irrigation.

It is assumed that requiring Best Management Practices (BMPs) will prevent spills, but constant vigilance by the regulators is needed, and with our State going broke, and Regional Board staff being cut back as we write, such oversight cannot be relied upon. The fox will then be guarding the chicken house. The City of Santa Rosa would be responsible for contracts with third parties to run the irrigation program. The City has fought long and hard to get wastewater runoff legalized before they implement a wastewater irrigation program, in our view proof that they can't do a program without runoff. Landscape irrigation runoff is common; it can't be totally controlled. If many small discharges occurred at once, it can have a major water quality impact at a time when human use is at its greatest and dilution capacity of the river at its minimum.

RRWPC attempting settlement on RRCSD wastewater pond...

RRWPC has been negotiating with the County over several months on the RRCSD storage pond, which was authorized early this year. We have proposed four points that need agreement in order for us to not sue. (more details in our next mailer) The County has indicated a wish to settle and have provided us with a few proposals, none of which are thus far adequate. We have to agree with their terms or file a lawsuit by September 1st. We hope you will support us in our need to raise funds for this possibility.

RRWPC needs your help...more than ever!

RRWPC has been taking on many challenges, and our income has not kept up with our costs. **We are currently very much in need of your help.** Please give as generously as you can, and also please pass this information on to other interested parties who might want to be informed on this issue. We know this is a very hard time and many of you are hurting financially, but even a small amount would be appreciated.