

March, 2009

Dear Russian River Supporter:

Water, here and there and now you see it and now you don't....

Critical water shortage alerts have bombarded us in the media lately. The County Water Agency misses no opportunity to alert everyone to the critical need for stringent conservation. They will soon request the State Water Board to declare a temporary state of emergency that would allow the Agency to limit lower river flows to as little as 35 cubic feet per second, (normally at least 125) for the coming summer. Those flows would put an end to recreation this year and significant environmental harm could occur. There will be a big meeting on this topic the day after we have to print this mailer.

We can almost predict what will happen, however. The Agency will show up with about 8-10 staff people and lots of maps and graphs showing how low Lake Mendocino is and how they don't have enough water to get through the season even as they release way more than needs to be used at this time, trying to make the point that they are being forced to waste water now against their will in order to meet minimum flows! They will tell us that PG&E has cut diversions from the Eel River by 33% and the current means for determining minimum flows needs to be changed. Some cut back in flows may be warranted, but not to the critical dry levels of 35-50 cubic feet per second (cfs) that they intend to request. RRWPC believes that 100 cfs would be much more appropriate.

All of this might get our sympathy, except for other contradictory messages coming out of their organization at the same time. One of the messages was discovered in their Water Project Environmental Impact Report (EIR). In describing the flow model used to determine releases, they say, "*The model takes into account not only the Agency's diversions, but all of the diversions in the watershed, whether or not the diversions are legally permitted. Thus the model assumes that all demands in the watershed,...are satisfied with its simulated flow releases.*" If the model is used to determine how much water gets released then they are knowingly providing water for illegal uses. They have complained bitterly for years about illegal uses (usually by agriculture).

Ironically the Water Agency recently held six formal hearings around the County on a proposed project intended to INCREASE the amount of water they could withdraw from the river, although the water would come from Lake Sonoma and not Lake Mendocino. At the Guerneville, Santa Rosa, and Sonoma meetings, there were fewer citizens attending than Agency staff present, even while the Agency stated extensive publicity had occurred. For years, the Agency has been planning for increased water diversions that would allow permitted withdrawals to go from 75,000 acre feet a year (AFY) to 101,000 AFY. This increase is being requested as water use is going way down and the urban population is diminishing because of the housing and financial crisis.

Role of the Biological Opinion...

Last October, the Biological Opinion, having the standing of Federal Law, and focused on Water Agency operations, was released. National Marine Fisheries Service is in charge of its application on behalf of saving Coho and Chinook salmon and Steelhead Trout. The three controversial goals of the project will take ten to fifteen years to implement and include permanent lowering of river flows, permanent closing of the mouth at Jenner, and habitat restoration in Dry Creek, OR a pipeline accessing Lake Sonoma water down to the Russian River. We will follow these issues closely, but they are also influencing the current situation now. The demand to lower summer flows will have a significant impact on recreation in the lower river. We will keep you informed.

Russian River County Sanitation District (RRCSD) Fee Increases....

For those of you owning property in the RRCSD, there's a big fee hike in your future. Recently we mailed a letter to ratepayers telling them how they might protest the \$1036 per hookup fee. Sonoma ratepayers recently got an increase to about \$650 and were complaining bitterly. We hope that Russian River CSD ratepayers will do the same. All you have to do is sign the orange form sent to you by the Water Agency and return it to the address on the form. If you have two or more parcels, you should have received one form for each and can protest every one separately. Sign all forms and return them in one envelope. If 51% of the ratepayer sign and return, they can't raise fees. The hearing on this will be April 21st at 2:15 PM at the Board of Supervisor's chambers in Santa Rosa.

Water Agency pushes through storage project for County Sanitation District....

County Supervisors are poised to approve a 3.5 million gallon storage project at the Treatment Plant for \$5.5 million dollars. While this storage is needed during high water periods for current flows, we are concerned that the project will be used to justify hooking up other communities and septic areas to our system. We have written extensively about why this could be a problem and will report more in the future, but we need to be brief here. While some storage is needed, this particular project has numerous problems that have not been resolved.

There are several geologic problems that we believe still need to be addressed but we cannot reveal details now. We need to report another issue that has not been addressed at all. Neeley Road is about a two and one half mile substandard country road running through a residential area that dead-ends at the RRCSD Treatment Plant.

Over a four-month period (an entire summer) the District anticipates that 9200 large truck trips (46 per day, five days a week) will be made over the road from Hwy. 116 to the Treatment Plant, with half hauling heavy earthen materials. This is for one project. There will be a second project over another summer that would have similar impacts.

But this is not all. The County Roads Department expressed concern about road repair after project completion, responsibility for costs of repair, and possible maintenance during the project. They state, *"The roadway will need to be cleared of brush and tree limbs for both vertical and horizontal clearance. A minimum of 20' of roadway needs to be cleared in order for trucks to pass each other.*

As you get close to the Treatment Plant, the road gets very narrow and is probably no more than 12' across in many places. The road has many blind curves, there are steep slopes along the edge of the road; there are private fences right up to the road; there is parking along narrow parts of the road where homes don't have their own private driveways; there are significant drainage problems along the road in many areas; there are slide areas; there are many mature redwood trees that may need to come down to make 20' across; the pavement is badly cracked in many places, and on and on and on. There are no sidewalks and people walk and ride bikes along the road. Two big trucks passing each other can cause an extreme hazard for pedestrians and pets. None of this was addressed in the environmental document.

RRWPC needs your help...more than ever!

RRWPC has taken on many challenges lately with the result that 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, especially if you have not donated in awhile, and also please pass this information on to other interested parties. We know this is a very hard time and many of you are hurting financially, but even a small amount would be appreciated.

RRWPC now has a website at www.rrwpc.org We also have PayPal available now for those preferring to send donations electronically. Please give if you can.

