

## **Gazette Article**

By Brenda Adelman

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### ***Santa Rosa's river discharge plans just keep coming.....***

Santa Rosa has come a long way since we first started tracking their wastewater discharge plans after the 800 million gallon sewage spill in 1985, 23 years ago. For about twelve years after that illegal dump, they ignored all pleas to diversify their system, increase conservation, repair leaky collection pipes, and greatly cut back on river discharges. Instead, they pursued numerous river discharge options that would allow them to greatly increase their dumping of treated sewage into the Russian River.

Then around 1997 two big events occurred. Three fish species were listed on the Federal Endangered Species List and Coho was listed on the State list. The Regional Water Board subsequently developed new water quality regulations that would improve conditions for the fish. The other major event, occurring at the time when Santa Rosa was about to embark on a plan to discharge treated sewage into the river at a rate of 20% instead of 5%, a consortium of Geysers steam field companies offered Santa Rosa a very attractive deal to send their wastewater 41 miles up the hill so they could expand steam-field operations, a project that would make Santa Rosa's wastewater disposal method unique in the nation and later became particularly noteworthy because of the subsequent energy crisis.

Originally the City contracted to send about 11 million gallons a day (mgd), but City officials recently negotiated an increase to 19 mgd. This has resulted in greatly diminished discharges to the Russian River. In fact, before the Geysers Project came on line, Santa Rosa discharged as much as 4.77 billion gallons into the river and in 2007, they discharged less than 0.3 billion.

### ***Current proposed project greatly expands capacity...***

Recently Santa Rosa released an environmental impact report (EIR) that calls for either direct river discharges in the Healdsburg area or at Steelhead Beach in Forestville, or continued discharge into the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

At a time when the housing market is hitting the skids, mortgages are hard to find, gas prices are through the roof, and global warming is threatening to seriously impair our standard of living, Santa Rosa is moving forward on a new river discharge project that could cost as much as \$500 million dollars. This project is enormously over-sized and would give them capacity that would serve them far beyond 2020 growth projections.

Numbers tell the tale. In 1992 summer sewage flows to the treatment plant were at 16.9 million gallons a day. In 2007, raw sewage flows in summer averaged 16.4 million gallons. THIS TELLS US THAT IN FIFTEEN YEARS, THE CITY DECREASED THEIR AVERAGE DRY WEATHER FLOW (ADWF) BY 500,000 GALLONS! Santa Rosa is currently allowed to discharge up to 21.3 million gallons a day, far more than they need.

This current project is sized to take Santa Rosa to 26 million gallons a day, even though it may be 40 years before they need to expand to this amount. While there are some components of this proposal that may be necessary to meet water quality standards now, most of it would be a very poor use of public funds at this time. Indeed, the City is currently considering expenditures of about \$100 million for additional storage, which

would address most of the remaining discharge needs and may even allow for zero discharge into the river under most circumstances.

***RRWPC supports minimal discharges if more highly treated...***

In heavy rain years, Santa Rosa may need to discharge small amounts into the Laguna for limited periods. RRWPC supports minimal continued discharge IF THE CITY TREATS THOSE DISCHARGES WITH ADVANCED MEMBRANE TREATMENT OR SOME SIMILAR ADVANCED TREATMENT in order to assure that unregulated chemicals do not end up in our drinking water supply. Santa Rosa is also studying an urban irrigation program, which would cost another \$150 million and could cause incidental runoff to end up in our creeks when flows are low and human contact high.

Santa Rosa wants the Regional Water Quality Control Board to lower standards on nutrients and other discharge requirements. The City refuses to utilize the precaution principle in regard to numerous unregulated chemicals in their wastewater. While remaining in low amounts, no one understands the cumulative impacts on humans and wildlife. A recent nationwide study by the Associated Press found similar chemicals present in the drinking water supply of at least 41 million Americans. Santa Rosa admits that there may be a problem, but claims they can do nothing about it until the Federal and State Governments set standards. By the time that happens though, many people can die and the fish can disappear. (There is a great deal of evidence that many of these chemicals interfere with human and wildlife reproductive systems and may also be carcinogenic.) The fish are disappearing anyway and we don't know why.

Comments are due on May 20<sup>th</sup>. Let the City know how you feel about river discharge.

