

November, 2009

Dear RRWPC Supporter:

Our last mailer of the year is customarily a time to review our accomplishments and challenges of the prior year. 2009 has been a very busy time for water issues in Sonoma County. Gazing into the future, and based on what we have seen so far, we surmise that it will get even more hectic in 2010. We also take this opportunity to thank our Board, our other volunteers, and all of you for helping to support and sustain our efforts.

We include our recent article submitted just days ago to the Sonoma County Gazette, summarizing current local water issue events. We thank publisher Vesta Copestakes for this beautifully formatted community newspaper that regularly publishes our work and that of other community members. You can see for yourself, as the entire paper can be read online at www.sonomacountygazette.com, including past issues. This mailer also contains a donor list of those who have given \$25 or more from November 1, 2008, through October 31, 2009. Because of limited space, we could not list those donating less than that amount. We are very grateful to all of you for your loyal and generous support.

Santa Rosa Wastewater:

- ***Discharge:*** Early this year, Santa Rosa finally gave up on direct discharge. They publicly stated that they didn't need the Steelhead Beach and Healdsburg discharge options, and in fact, for the first year ever, they discharged ZERO wastewater to the Laguna and Russian River last winter. Further, they promised that they would only discharge small amounts in future very wet years and most years would not have any discharge at all since the Geysers Project is taking most of the wastewater and because their successful conservation efforts have resulted in less wastewater being generated. (Partly because of our efforts over the last 25 years, they are only generating about 2 million gallons a day more than they were in 1985, when we first started working on this issue, even though since that time, Santa Rosa has almost doubled in population.)

Our current goal is to get them to fix their leaky collection system pipes, which not only release raw sewage in the summer time, but also allow a 60% to 90% increase of infiltration and inflow waters during heavy rains into their system. This is water that they must pay to treat and dispose of that could remain in the aquifer as water supply. In fact, almost all sewer systems see a doubling of raw sewage in the winter and most suffer from the same problems on a smaller scale.

- ***Urban Irrigation and Incidental Runoff:*** This has been a very active issue for all of 2009. City officials had developed an ambitious program to irrigate up to 2000 million gallons (mg) a year within city limits. They planned to start with a 250 mg pilot project in the Stony Point Road area serving mostly commercial and industrial properties. Our main concern has been their demand for a Basin Plan

Amendment to allow “incidental” runoff. In effect, that Amendment would eliminate the summer discharge prohibition.

RRWPC spent most of the last year responding to and providing testimony on very lengthy documents prepared by the Regional Water Quality Control Board on this and other issues. These documents included the proposed Basin Plan Amendment and what was called the MS4 Permit, which lay out the rules for determining legal exceptions to the summer discharge prohibition, a law preventing the City from making wastewater discharges in the summer time when flows are low and human use is high.

Briefly, the new regulations defined exceptions to the prior prohibition by including permission for “incidental” (supposedly accidental) runoff by irrigators. The problem with this variance is that in our view, the monitoring and reporting requirements are very weak. Once the complicated irrigation project is put in place, it is pretty much left up to the operator to report overflows, a real fox guarding the chicken house situation. To make matters worse, irrigation would occur in the night, when few would notice any problems, including those who are supposed to provide oversight and prevent runoff. RRWPC is particularly concerned about the thousands of unregulated chemicals in treated wastewater, which is not nearly as safe as it is portrayed.

Sonoma County Water Agency

RRWPC has been hard at work tracking all the doings of this Agency and their Contractors this last year. Most of what we covered is discussed in the separate article on water issues included in this mailer, so we won't repeat the information here.

RRWPC Russian River Picture Project....

In anticipation of the upcoming process to change lower summer Russian River flows (called Decision 1610), our group initiated a river photo project. We had several photographers selecting certain spots on the lower river and taking pictures regularly over the summer at their “spot”. We observed the changes in recreational use, water quality, beaches, and water levels, as SCWA had promised to cut flows less than half of normal so as to keep safe water levels in Lake Mendocino dams. They never went as low as they claimed they might, and recreational use remained fairly vigorous, but we did note serious water quality problems in the form of invasive Ludwigia (bright green plant mass along some of the banks) and also other kinds of algae pollution. The Regional Board has been apprised and promised to follow through on this.

Russian River County Sanitation District (RRCSD):

Russian River Watershed Protection Committee filed suit against the District over approval of the storage project in order to challenge them on certain geological and water quality problems, in addition to concerns about using the project to justify selling capacity to other communities. We also challenged impacts to Neeley Rd. that had not been addressed. We are hoping to settle this case soon and will keep you posted.

Sonoma County Water Coalition....

RRWPC has spent a great deal of time this last year working with the Coalition. We helped compose their Water Policy Statement, which has just been approved by 28 of the 30 environmental groups active in the group. It will soon be placed on their website

where everyone can read it. (www.scwatercoalition.org) Since the statement has RRWPC's strong support, you might want to read it. (The new policy statement isn't up yet, but should be up within a month. There is other interesting information however.)

RRWPC needs your help!

RRWPC has taken on many challenges this last year and next year will be even more demanding. We are very much in need of donations of any size. 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. Some of you only get our mailers annually. If you would like to receive our water and wastewater updates every other month, please send a small (or any) donation with the card provided and state that you want to be on our regular list. Also, you might want to visit our website at www.rrwpc.org. If you would like to donate through PayPal, you can do it there.

Have a wonderful Holiday Season and a very happy New Year!

This is the mailer where we take stock of our accomplishments and assess the direction of things to come.