

Fish Flow Project Update, 11.26.2016

The Nov. 17th County Hearing on the low flow project at the Guerneville Vet's Building was very well attended. There were at least 100 people in the audience and about a third spoke about their concerns including those of the proliferation of algae and possible toxic exposures of children and pets. Impacts to the economy from warning signs on beaches about possible public health risks were viewed as a big problem both because of concern for public health and concerns for the area's tourist based businesses. Water quality in general was questioned and the need for the Jenner Estuary Project which forms the basis for flow reductions, were also considered.

Supervisor Carrillo ran the meeting as the Hearing Officer representing the Board of Supervisors. The Water Agency Staff and lead regional staff of the Department of Fish and Wildlife and National Marine Fisheries Services made brief comments about the project, as did Water Agency Staff. A court reporter took down all that was said. We believe that the record of the meeting will be available on the website of the Supervisors and/or Sonoma County Water Agency. Here's a link to the Staff presentation http://www.scwa.ca.gov/files/docs/environment/environmental-documents/fish-flow/FISH-FLOW-DEIR-PRESENTATION-11_17_2016_FINAL.pdf but we didn't yet find the transcript of citizen comments. We will check into when that will be available.

In the meantime, many of you signed protest letters to the State Water Board who had initiated their process to permanently change Russian River flows. The letter in effect was questioning the need to lower flows for fish in our area of the river. The deadline for signed letters was to be Nov. 22nd, but our attorney filed a request asking for a time extension, and we believe two other groups and/or agencies also appealed for more time. The morning of the 22nd, word came that **THE EXTENSION HAD BEEN GRANTED. Letters are now due the same day comments are due on the DEIR: FEBRUARY 14, 2017.**

The State has now received approximately 300 letters. **WE WOULD LIKE TO INCREASE THAT AMOUNT TO 1000.** The same letter is attached to this email so you can help get more signatures. (People can write their own comments on the back of the paper or put them on separate paper, but we ask that they be attached to a signed copy of our letter which meets State requirements. We will make sure that everything reaches project staff.) Many people had sent the letters to the State but not to the Water Agency. (Letters won't be counted unless they also go to the proper person at the Water Agency.) Some sent letters to me but didn't say if they were originals or copies. It started to get very confusing so **we are requesting that all signed letters be sent to RRWPC (print your name and address above and sign and date below) and we will forward them to the people who are supposed to receive them.** Then we can make a list and know for sure that both agencies received the letters in a timely manner (I request a response from State acknowledging receipt of letters so we have a record, and they have been very nice about doing that.) RRWPC Contact information below. You can send by Email or USPS mail. Our PayPal button is on our website if you want to help fund our attorney.

The State appears to be paying attention to our concerns. Please help us increase our effort!

Next steps: The hearings on the EIR are over and the next thing we do is comment on the document. Sometime in early February, we will do up another target letter for people to use as their comments, if you are unable to do your own. We will keep you informed about developments as they occur, but we expect not much more will happen at this point. RRWPC is working with an attorney who will also be submitting comments. Comments will be submitted by Feb. 14th deadline and at that point Water Agency staff will begin their response to comments. The completion of their responses can take about 6 months to a year, depending on what comes in. When comments are complete and proposed changes are suggested, everything will go into one document and presented to the Board of Supervisors. A hearing will be scheduled and advertised about 3 weeks to a month after completion, and it will then be up to the Supervisors whether to approve and/or make findings. (Supervisors can make changes to document/project.) After receiving Supervisor's approval, everything will go to the State Water Board for consideration of permanent flow changes. That will open up a new series of reports, comments, findings, hearings, etc. and could take up to two years or more.

Finally, I forgot to mention that groups have 30 days after approval of the project to file a legal motion opposing the project. This would of course slow everything up considerably. There could be many legal actions filed concerning different aspects of the project up and down the river and things could be held up for years.

Sorry for the long email, but I thought that detailed information on what happens next would be helpful. Please share this with anyone who might be interested. Ask them to sign letter and send back to me (they would have to download letter, sign and date, and scan so it could then be attached to email. Or it can just be sent as letter to RRWPC and we will be sure to forward.