



Friends of Del Norte

Committed to our environment since 1973

*A nonprofit, membership based conservation group
advocating sound environmental policies for our region.*

PO Box 229, Gasquet, CA 95543

Jan. 9, 2015

Water Quality Control Board

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Matt St. John
Executive Officer

Regarding Triennial Review of CA North Coast Regional Basin Plan- Comments due Jan. 9, 2015

Task 11 **Designate Wild and Outstanding National Resource Water (ONRW) for the Smith River,**
focusing on the three forks (including tributaries) of the Smith River, as a high priority.

The Smith River has been recommended by numerous environmental organizations, and your staff, as deserving of the highest water quality designation as an ONRW. However, this recommendation has not been taken up as a high priority. It is now urgent to obtain this protective status, because the Smith River is under immediate threat of proposed strip mining for nickel and strategic metals. Your own staff has recently responded (attachments) to a current proposal for water extraction to enable strip mining adjacent to the North Fork, stating that the Smith River is the crown jewel of California, and that strip mining along the North Fork in Oregon would not be in the public's best interest. Currently the Oregon Dept. of Water Resources has rejected the proposal for water extraction.

We ask that the California Water Quality Board and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality Commission work in concert, to fully protect the three forks of the Smith River, the North, Middle and South, which wholly traverse Federal Lands, and terminate at the Main Stem within Jedediah Redwood State Park , a world heritage site.

Designation as ONRW would better safeguard outstanding national values that include protection of critical habitat for California's last Endangered Coho Salmon, enjoyment of a recreational treasure, the longest stretch of National and State Wild and Scenic River (over 300 miles), and an aesthetic focal point for both Redwood National and State Park (a UNESCO world heritage site), as well as Smith River National Recreation Area. Also included in a long list of beneficial use is supplying most of Del Norte County with the highest quality drinking water, and an important cultural heritage resource of the Tolowa Native American Tribes.

We now ask you to take urgently needed action to protect these values, because the Smith River is under immediate threat from nickel/rare mineral strip mining proposals. The Smith River is currently recognized as one of the most threatened rivers by American Rivers because of current strip mining proposals.

Designation as ONRW will protect the Smith River from antidegradation policy loop holes, that could allow pollution from industrial development of strategic metals of national importance to trump the important values that we currently enjoy. Unfortunately, the Siskiyou-Rogue River National Forest Service is dictated by the antiquated 1872 Mining Act, which places mining as a best use of their landscape. The mining company, Redflat Nickel has not been deterred in their quest, and is appealing the Oregon Water Resources decision. If Redflat Nickel finds an alternate water source for their exploration, the Forest Service can be forced to acquiesce. ONRW designation by both Oregon and California will close the antidegradation loop hole, and give the forks of the Smith River the added protection that is needed.

Please elevate to a high priority ONRW designation of the three forks of the Smith River. Attached are some of the responses of the entire community of Del Norte, California, and Southern Oregon, to the proposed mining on a tributary of the North Fork Smith River in Oregon. These include Crescent City Council, Del Norte County Board of Supervisors, California Dept of Fish and Wildlife, California Dept of Water Resources, several environmental organizations. An outpouring of thousands of citizen responses also opposed the strip mining threat, as well as the two Native American Rancherias within Del Norte County, representing the Tolowa Tribe with concern for their ancestral lands within both California and Oregon.

Thank you,

Eileen Cooper

Eileen Cooper, vice president, FODN- on behalf of the Board

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