



Enforcement News

Healdsburg resort developer fined \$6.4 million for Clean Water Act violations

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Healdsburg – The North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board formally approved a \$6.4 million fine against the developer of a 65-acre Saggio Hills luxury resort, hotel, and residential project discharging 9.4 million gallons of highly turbid water into Russian River tributaries and scores of related water quality violations.

During today’s public hearing, the North Coast Water Board considered the proposed fine against Sonoma Luxury Resort after hearing testimony and reviewing its photos and other evidence documenting the violations throughout the construction site. Before issuing the order that imposed the fine, the Board also considered arguments and evidence from the developer, Sonoma Luxury Resort LLC. A [copy of the administrative complaint](#) details the violations, and the adopted order.

“This fine reflects the substantial violations found over a wide area after multiple storms,” said North Coast Water Board Chair Valerie Quinto. “The North Coast Water Board takes these violations seriously and has made enforcement of violations of storm water permits a priority in the North Coast Region.”

An investigation by the North Coast Water Board found that site managers consistently failed to use best management practices to prevent or minimize pollutants from discharging off site, resulting in egregious violations over many months and threatening the well-being of salmon populations. Board staff first identified significant deficiencies with the site in November 2018 and temporarily suspended construction in December 2018 to give the developer the chance to correct its procedures.

Following their initial inspection, North Coast Water Board staff noted modest improvements to best management practices, though such practices appeared to be short-lived, as construction was again suspended in February 2019 for failure to implement and maintain adequate and effective BMPs. Unauthorized discharges to waterways continued to occur from the site through May 2019 and after the developer removed BMPs from many active construction areas.



All owners of construction sites larger than one acre must enroll in the stormwater permitting program, which among other things, requires hiring a “stormwater professional” to design and install erosion and sediment controls. Failure to design, employ and maintain best management practices that prevent or minimize pollutants from discharging off site can result in sediment-laden stormwater that threatens to smother aquatic animals and habitat, alter or obstruct flows that could lead to flooding, and reduce water clarity.

The stormwater permit, designed to protect against weather-related environmental damage originating at building sites, requires developers to implement precautionary measures such as slope stabilization, erosion and sediment control, curtailment of activity when it rains, and the use of sediment basins and traps to contain highly erosive soils.

The North Coast Water Board’s mission is to develop and enforce water quality objectives and implement plans that will best protect the region’s waters while recognizing our local differences in climate, topography, geology and hydrology

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