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18 March 2009

Matt St. John, North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
5550 Skylane Blvd., Suite A
Santa Rosa, Ca. 95403

RE: Comments for the 2008 303(d) List of Water Quality Limited Segments

Dear North Coast Regional Water Control Board:

My family and I have lived on the upper Mark West Creek above Rincon Valley in Santa Rosa for the past eight and a half years. In that relatively short time we have seen many drastic changes in the creek flow and life in the creek. We are all naturalists of the amateur kind, and I have been taking the measurements of creek volume and other scientific readings through the guidance of the Community Clean Water Institute (CCWI) for the past six years. I measure turbidity, dissolved oxygen content, pH level, electrical conductivity, and temperature, as well as the flow in cubic feet per second.

Even taking account of the rather dry 2007-08 rain year, the flow this summer was almost non-existent. And the truck traffic up to the wineries has increased many fold as they are planting more acres of grapes every year. Sadly, as the vineyards replace the conifer and oak forests, the rainfall has no chance to seep into the ground and the creek levels rise more dramatically every year, even after a rather meager amount of rain. Conversely, the creek level falls just as quickly as it has risen and we get much less of a "winter flow" than seven or eight years ago. It is a scouring water flow after each rain event. This leads to less water retention and the springs which used to charge our watersheds are no longer doing so. The summer creek flows are notably lower.

The life in Mark West Creek was abundant when we moved here in 2000. The propane delivery man showed me pictures of Coho salmon under our car bridge from January 2000.

There were 13 salmon, none smaller than 30 inches! We have never viewed a salmon since, The 36 “ deep pools where we swam in 2000 are now less than 12” deep in the summer. Where we had thousands of Steelhead fingerlings in the fall of 2000, we had ZERO in 2008 at the same time of year. The sedimentation from up-stream winery landslides has taken away the breeding pools for the Steelhead who fight to get up here. The salmon—a life blood of the watershed at one point in time—are long gone. The increased flow of sediment-laden water is eating away the roots of trees along the banks of the riparian corridor and the water temperature is increasing—another danger sign for life in the creek.

The Mark West Creek, although many miles from the Pacific Ocean, has been a prolific contributing water body feeding the Russian River with cool and clean water springing from underground reserves in the pristine hills of the Mayacamas Range. It could be restored to a fertile spawning region to help our fisheries and tourism businesses. This once flowing treasure needs help NOW and it is not too late to save the fish. If we wait more than a few years, the genetic coding for the fish to return up here will be gone forever.

I am available with data and time to contribute more detail, if needed.

Thank you for accepting and reading my letter of concern. Please move up the schedule to correct prior damage to the Mark West Creek!!

Sincerely,

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