

PUBLIC COMMENTOR 244 - PATTY ROGERS, SEPTEMBER 24, 1996

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Hi, my name is Patty Rogers. I'm a proprietor for Sweet Reunion Inn and Resort in Guerneville on the Russian River. I am here to speak, as there's only been a few mentions of the tourism in Sonoma County being affected by a greater discharge into the Russian River.

My husband and I are members of various chambers and regional visitors center organizations within Sonoma County. At meetings of these various organizations, it is clearly understood by those of us who are in the tourist trade that Sonoma County as it stands only can remain the way that it is if those of us in the tourist business do our job to bring moneys into this county and allow it to remain as an agricultural, forest land, river community, as opposed to larger and larger growth. We came here, and I'm sure all of you came here, because of what Sonoma County is, and those of us in the tourist trade feel that we have a very big part in being able to maintain what Sonoma County is now and keep it that way.

We've only had our business for this past year, and we were asked to do a survey which was mentioned earlier on how many people that are our guests actually go into the river.

I sat down and thought about the numbers of people that we have seen this last year and wrote in the report that 7 probably only about 30 to 40 percent do go into the river. Most of those would be the children. We are a family resort. We see numbers of children over the summer. We can see as many as 150 to 200 people a week during the summertime, which comes up to be close to 1500 or so during the summer season. Of that, only a small portion then has gone into the river. The rest of them have chosen not to, and I have been told it is because they understand there is dumping.

In the report they are indicating that if the people are educated correctly from outside the area, that there will not be a problem.

Well, Sonoma county's becoming very popular. We have seen many people from Europe. We see most of our guests come from silicon valley, Marin, San Francisco. They are educated. They read newspapers. They have money to spend in your county. And they are telling me what they're reading in their newspapers, and they're not being educated the way you're feeling that they are. They are coming and saying "we are reading about the dumping. We're not going to go into the river."

We had a number of children incidents that happened this last summer. We had some eye injury -- or eye sensitivities. Some rashes, some intestinal problems. These mothers and fathers took their children to various hospitals, doctors in Santa Rosa, not just the clinic in Guerneville. And every one of them was told that it was caused from some type of organism that was in the river. Maybe this is a natural organism, but you weren't going to convince these people of that, because they have read that there is a discharge. So they have immediately determined that that is the case.

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I know for a fact, because I asked the doctor, there are normal living organisms in rivers that can cause these types of things, and they wouldn't necessarily be caused from a discharge, but you're not going to convince those people of that, because they -- like I said, Sonoma County is up there.

It has become a popular place. Your visitor center, your chambers are doing a wonderful job. This is a place people want to go. I'm told they come here instead of the Napa Valley because we have a river. Because we have a redwood forest. Because we are close to the ocean. So you are now seeing an influx of a different group of people than possibly used to come to the river. We're new, so we're seeing the newcomers to the river, and your newcomers to Sonoma County are people you want here, you want to enjoy your county, you want to have spend money in your county, and they want to be on your river. But right now they don't want to go in it, and I'm not certain that they'll come back again, having learned the things that they have learned about the discharge, and I don't think you can educate them enough. I don't believe you should be discharging.

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I don't swim in the river. I have property on the river. I pay taxes to be on the river. I maintain it. I have a sensitive system, and if I go in the river I get rashes, and -- and I have problems. So I'm not going in it myself, which is a very sad thing to me, because I would like very much to be in it. It's a beautiful place to be. For every -- I am told that in -- in any business, for every one person that is unhappy with the situation you can count on that they will tell 40 people, and in just our business alone that would be 40 times 2,000 people in just summer months that then take that percentage, and they're going away with not very good opinions of the river, and possibly then not coming back to Sonoma county. Thank you.

Mayor Wright:

Thank you Patty. Martin Smith is not here. Maureen Middlebrook?