

commentletters

LATE COMMENT

From: ann maurice <annmaurice954@gmail.com>
Sent: Tuesday, June 16, 2015 10:43 PM
To: commentletters
Subject: russian river emergency regs



SWRB
Sacramento, CA

Dear Board members,

I received your notice since I live in the headwaters of Green Valley Creek, a tributary of the Russian River. I am a past member of Salmon Unlimited, Trout Unlimited, and was awarded honorary membership in a sportsfishing association because of my strong advocacy for fishing, for salmonids and especially focusing on the health of the tributaries. I have testified repeatedly over the past 20 years regarding the disgraceful decline of salmon and steelhead due to the relentless dewatering of coastal creeks and streams.

It has never been over-fishing that is causing the decline. It is the dewatering of the tributaries and degradation of spawning beds that had served salmon and steelhead for thousands of years.

There is no question that the expansion of irrigated vineyards in the hills of the coast has been the principal cause of the dewatering. Irrigating grapes is relatively new. Grapes are a mediterranean crop perfectly suited to California because they are native to a winter-wet/summer-dry climate regime. But, they are grown all over the world WITHOUT irrigation. In fact, some wine experts argue if you have to irrigate you do not have a "terroir"

Some wine appellation authorities in France do not even allow irrigation. Those grapes are "dry-farmed". Dry-farming was the norm in California as practiced by the early European immigrants who brought their European rootstock with them.

We have some dry-farmed vineyards in our county. But since irrigation increases tonnage per acre, vineyard owners began irrigating with a corresponding strain on the watershed and sacrifice of the fishery!

How long did we expect this to continue with 10s of thousands of acres converted to irrigated vines before causing a collapse of the fishery?

And in relentless pursuit of more land for vineyards, winegrapes are planted on land subject to frost necessitating frost control! How to protect vines from freezing temperatures? Unfortunately, the Sonoma Resource Conservation District recommends flood irrigating the soil and drenching the vines, further depleting the aquifers.

County Planning Departments, including ours in Sonoma County, have granted permits for vineyard development allowing groundwater use for frost protection and irrigation. Vineyards have been granted permits without analysis of impacts on groundwater or even adjacent wells. Couldn't we foresee the inevitable?

How much water do grapevines use? That's no great secret! The Sonoma County Grapegrowers association has long insisted that a 5 acre vineyard uses as much water as a 5 acre ranchette. Think about that. Picture a 200

acre vineyard. Would Sonoma County planners allow 40 homes on 200 acres in our area, the headwaters of the creeks in question? Absolutely not. Anyone would question water availability for that density, yet vineyards get approved readily.

This should be, **MUST** be your focus, not expensive and time consuming concern about rural homeowners in our neighborhood watering lawns! What lawns? Rural residents in this area are on wells with water scarcity. We are acutely aware of water use and know that commercial agriculture is the biggest water user by far, not us!

Can the SWRCB:
require that vineyard permit applications must not be exempt from CEQA per state environmental law especially regarding water use and wells;

ban potable or groundwater use for frost protection? (If you can forbid ornamental lawn watering, why not?)

offer incentives for dry farming?

set a cap on the amount of water shipped out of the watershed?

develop a plan to phase out irrigated vineyard from the headwaters of the 4 watersheds in question?

Time does not permit further brainstorming.

Kindly withdraw your draft regulation and consider holding instead a workshop in our community so that we can address the dewatering of the tributaries as a community with assistance from regulators including the SWRCB.

Sincerely,
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I hope the