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STATE WATER RESOURCES
CONTROL BOARD

Contact:

Brian J. Johnson, Trout Unlimited, 415-385-0796, bjohnson@tu.org
Duff Bevill, Sonoma County Winegrape Commission, 707-529-7349, duffbevill@earthlink.net

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Wine Industry Leaders and Trout Unlimited Announce "Water and Wine" Program to Enhance Stream Flow and Improve Water Supply Reliability in Sonoma County

Healdsburg, CA – Leading Sonoma County vineyard owners and Trout Unlimited today announced a new effort to develop common sense solutions to water supply and stream flow problems in California.

Sonoma County Supervisor Paul Kelley and Quivira Vineyards will host an event announcing the Water and Wine program along the banks of Wine Creek in Dry Creek Valley today at 2:30 PM. The program is being developed as a response to the State Water Board's draft North Coast Instream Flow Policy, which would establish guidelines for administering water rights and maintaining instream flows.

"Growers support cooperative efforts of property owners and conservation groups to promote sustainable practices while balancing the need to provide for regional economic viability and regulatory certainty," said Duff Bevill, the Chairman of the Sonoma County Winegrape Commission.

"We haven't had much good news about California salmon, and this is good news," said Brian J. Johnson, Director of Trout Unlimited's California Water Project. "If we can't find common ground to resolve conflicts over water, we can't bring back salmon and steelhead. With 'Water and Wine,' we've found that common ground." Trout Unlimited also released a new report, Water and Wine: Partners in Wine Country Stewardship.

"The goal is to develop a 'Watershed Approach' for real resource management that will ultimately augment other restoration efforts in the Russian River Basin," said Kelley. "When people work together, we get more comprehensive and cost-effective solutions for both growers and for streams."

Participating landowners will work with TU, the Sonoma County Winegrape Commission, and the Sonoma County Salmon Coalition to investigate opportunities for a "watershed approach" to improving water supply reliability and stream flows, and process water rights by streams or sub-basins.

The landowners account for over 30 generations and more than 725 years of experience of agricultural stewardship and growing the finest grapes within Sonoma County. Program participants include:

Alderbrook Winery
Bevill Family Vineyards
Cadd Ranch
Jackson Family Wines
Mauritson Vineyards and Winery
Michel-Schlumberger Wine Estate
Mounts Vineyards and Winery
Nelson Vineyards

Quivira Vineyards
Robert Young Vineyards
Rodney Strong Vineyards
Rued Vineyards and Winery
Simi Winery
Steelhead Wines
Weinstock Vineyards
Wine Creek Vineyard

Traditionally, water diverters have been regulated individually. As a result, water users have had little flexibility or opportunity to share costs or coordinate diversions. Given the opportunity, water users could develop physical solutions to stream flow problems, like small storage ponds for rainy-season water. The program announced today hopes to provide this opportunity.

The Water & Wine partners are embarking on a feasibility study for the purpose of identifying and beginning work on pilot watersheds to test the approach. Ultimately, the group will establish stream flow objectives for individual streams and to prepare management plans to accomplish those objectives. The management plans will be designed to allow expedited permitting of water rights and to meet landowner needs for regulatory certainty and water supply stability.

The water management plans will also be part of the Sonoma County Salmonid Coalition's mission to protect and restore salmonids and their habitat in the Alexander, Dry Creek and Knights Valleys of the Russian River Watershed, and to create sustainable partnerships for farmers and fish. Core components of that effort include participation from a broad spectrum of interests to meet the challenges around water supply, as discussed today, plus habitat restoration, and beneficial management practices on the 25,000 acres of agricultural land within those valleys.

The idea for taking a watershed approach to water rights issues originated in an ongoing dialog between Trout Unlimited, wine industry leaders and other stakeholders to discuss the Instream Flow Policy and water rights problems in California's North Coast. The draft Policy was recently released and recognizes the potential for a collaborative watershed approach. The State Water Board is taking comments on the draft policy through May 1, 2008.

Sonoma County's winegrowing community has a long history of promoting sustainable agriculture. Over 260 Sonoma County grape growers have completed self-assessments using the industry's Code of Sustainable Winegrowing. Those growers farm 40,000 of the county's 60,000 grape acres. For more information, see the Sonoma County Winegrape Commission's website at www.sonomawinegrape.org.

Trout Unlimited is the nation's oldest and largest coldwater fisheries conservation organization, and is dedicated to protecting, conserving, and restoring North America's trout and salmon and their watersheds. TU has approximately 150,000 members nationwide. In California, TU has about 15,000 members and offices in Berkeley, Santa Rosa, Salinas, and Truckee. For a copy of Trout Unlimited's "Water and Wine" publication, see www.tu.org/california.

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