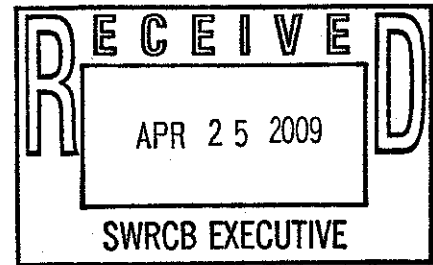


April 24, 2009

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RE: Comments for May 6th Workshop on Order WR 2009-0027-DWR

Dear Chairman Hoppin and Members of the Board,

I am writing to express my concern regarding impacts related to Order 2009-0027- DWR and modifications in permit terms that would reduce those impacts. The reduction in flows will cause severe impacts to water quality, recreation, community water systems, over-summering juvenile salmon and Steelhead as well as the lower River economy that depends on a healthy Russian River.

I own four riverfront properties, upstream of the dam at Memorial Beach in Healdsburg. I have been carefully observing the condition of the river on a daily basis over the past six years.

As a benchmark, I would like to go back to the summer of 2003, and recount the health of the river at that time. The water stretched from bank to bank, creating a healthy, thriving environment for aquatic life. The shallows along the banks lapped at the trunk line of the trees that shaded the banks. The water in the shallows was shaded and cool. It was teeming with life that included swarms of polly wogs and tiny fish. They were hiding among the fallen dead logs and submerged branches along the edges. There was no invasive water plant covering the surface of the waters, and the water was clear and clean and cool. At night, a chorus of bull frogs could be heard every night without fail.

Let me contrast the condition of the river that year with the condition of the river in the spring of 2009. The river has now contracted far away from its banks, and there are wide stretches of exposed rocky "beach" on either side. A rocky island has also appeared in the middle of the river, which was never seen at any time previously in the past six years. I see no polly wogs, and have noticed no small fish. What I do see is the waterline in the full sun. There are no shady shallows providing a "nursery" environment that allows newborn aquatic life to take a foothold and flourish. I haven't heard a bull frog in many summers. The river is suddenly becoming host to an invasive water plant. I believe this will be about the third year now, since that plant first made its appearance. As early as the month of June, last summer, algae began to grow profusely, and to clog the waters. It wouldn't be so surprising to find algae growing, perhaps in August, when lots of hot weather has acted to raise the temperature of the water, but in the earliest part of the June, the appearance of so much algae seems like a symptom of illness.

Even ducks have disappeared. In 2003, the activity of ducks was lively. There were little families everywhere on the river, with baby ducklings learning to swim, and trailing after their mothers up and down the river. I'm not seeing them now, except for an occasional duck. I'm also seeing far fewer blue heron. I could see one each day, if I looked, just a few years ago. They used to stand stock-still in the reeds on the bank, perfectly camouflaged, as they waited patiently for a passing fish. Their habitat has dried up. They are not used to standing, exposed, on the hot rocky beaches that now line the river in wide swaths on each side of the water's edge. I'd say I maybe see one blue heron a month now.

I've also noticed the habits of larger fish. The sucker fish that feed on the bottom are content to scavenge the bottom in full sunlight conditions, but the larger, steelhead, or salmon, that I see, stay almost entirely hidden in the shade, in deep holes in the river bottom. When they do move, it's to quickly dart from one, dark, shaded spot to another. Where are they going to go in the newly drained conditions? There is so much hype doing everything possible to restore native salmon, but I see few indications that anyone is really thinking and caring. Do you really believe that salmon like warm, unshaded water? That's not what I've been observing to be the case.

Fortunately for me, I've had the opportunity to observe the river from a privileged vantage point, and have observed quite a few things. I see folks who love dogs, and who keep them confined to small areas above the river. I've seen the litter of green moldy dog feces laying all over the ground, where the owner doesn't provide the care and oversight to clean up. Where does run off from that kind of polluted waste go? Straight downhill into the river. With high

volumes of water, perhaps it didn't matter as much. But, I propose that in today's low flow such run off could be very significant. You might take pause, also, to think about the possibility of failing septic systems, and what conditions that might lead to in the river's newly restricted state.

Perhaps you are thinking that in time the river's bank could contract to "fit" the new low flow water line, and that trees and reeds could start to grow at the edge of the water and provide shelter, again. But, I suggest not. During the winter, to control the amount of water being retained by dams upstream, orders are given to release water into the Russian River, and those releases come un-announced and suddenly, and have often caused significant flooding (and damages) to this area. Trees are knocked down, and banks are scoured.

The river is experiencing extremes, not at the hand of nature, but by a hierarchy of government decision making policies. The natural order has been replaced by too much water and flooding in the winter, and too little, draught-like, water levels in the summer.

I actually rent to vacationers, who come to enjoy the river as a recreation destination. I hesitate to mention this because my interest in the river is not an economic one, but a personal one. I love the river, and have since childhood. It refreshes the human soul to be able to have a ring-side seat and watch the splendors of nature. Many people share my enthusiasm, but they are hearing rumors that the river is shrinking, and no longer a suitable place to swim, or fish, or canoe, or find recreation. They call me to give "reports" on the likelihood of being able to swim if they come to visit. Will the water be clean? Will they be able to canoe?

When I cannot answer their questions confidently, they lose their confidence, as well, and change their plans about coming to Healdsburg, and make their travel plans to other destinations. There is a monetary loss here, and I'm not just thinking about myself. What is lost is bed tax money that I would have paid to Sonoma County, and wages I would have paid to cleaning ladies, to maintenance men, to the local laundry, and for purchases of supplies I would have made at local businesses. The local canoe concessioner gets less business, the local grocery stores get less summer vacationers in to stock up, the local restaurants get less patrons, and anyone who in any way caters to tourists feels the pinch. It all adds up.

So, whether we're talking about an economic problem, or a devastating environmental choice, I think that we need to re-assess the situation and avoid making big some mistakes.

In order to reduce the impacts from reduced flows under Order 2009-0027-DWR we urge you on May 6 to take action to protect water quality and beneficial uses in the Russian River.

Specifically we urge you to:

- Increase frequency of chemical water quality monitoring to every two weeks with results posted promptly on a public website to proactively prevent water quality problems such as algae blooms from increased nutrient concentrations.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Sincerely,

Lisa Neisingh
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