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An environmentally sensitive stewardship organization protecting river, tributary and watershed property rights.

Russian River Property Owner's Association
PO Box 2124
Healdsburg, CA 95448

Phone: 707-857-3513
Fax: 707-857-3513



Officers of Russian River Property Owner's Association
President — Al Cadd
Vice President — Pete Dayton
Secretary — Johanna Vanoni
Treasurer — Lee Gunnerson

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PO Box 2124
Healdsburg, CA 95448
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Editor — Wendy Dayton, Vista Designs, LLC

2009 Steelhead Festival

The 2nd Annual Steelhead Festival was held on February 7th this year. Mother nature took pity on us by providing a perfectly gorgeous day.

RRPOA was in the same spot as last year, this time though there were more RRPOA members and a lot more information. We had a contest (Question provided by Bill Cox, Fish & Game Fisheries Biologist) that tested your steelhead knowledge and awarded the lucky winner \$50.

Our booth had a continuously running presentation about the projects that RRPOA is involved in (Arundo removal, riparian habitat restoration, water conservation, sustainable farming practices and stream restoration.

Everyone one of these projects is important to RRPOA as well as our work with the Salmonid Coalition and partnerships with local and state agencies.

Sotoyome RCD was a great help, allowing us to use some of their project pictures in our presentation.

Marc Kelley from the Salmonid Coalition was there with us too, handing out information on their projects and answering questions.

We also gave away bumper stickers illustrating the correlation between farming practices and steelhead fisheries. A picture of the sticker is below this article.

The booth sported a very nice backdrop display, which had print-outs of the presentation slides and additional images depicting the removal and replacement of a too nar-

row and blocked culvert with a much larger opening and the blockages removed.

All in all the day was fun and a success; we also learned what we should change for next years festival to make our booth even more interesting.

Thanks to everyone who contributed time, pictures, setup and breakdown duties, booth watching and more.

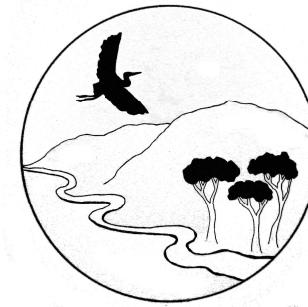
Next year promises to be another adventure!

- Wendy Dayton

Responsible Farming = Healthy Fisheries



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Salmonid Coalition Update

For the last two months the Salmon Coalition has focused efforts on water conservation in the vineyards. Agriculture producers are considering best management practices that will conserve water and reduce water demand for irrigation and frost protection purposes. The best management practices include the following recommendations:

Frost protection is critical, but conservation is still possible

Watching and responding to dew point as well as air temperature can lead to water conservation. If dew points are high, consider delaying the start of frost protection until closer to 32 degrees. Also, stop frost sprinkler system use following sunrise as soon as the temperature rises above 32 and no ice remains on the vine. Growers should reevaluate the number of staff needed to more effectively manage frost sprinkler timing.

Growers need to coordinate pumping schedules with Water Agency releases to maximize beneficial flow levels.

Pursue measures with the CA Water Resources Control Board.

If growers were allowed to store riparian water in their reservoirs for more than 30 days, diversions could begin at an earlier date and be diverted at a lower rate over a longer period of time. This could minimize demand peaks for the Water Agency.

Website Updates

Check out -

www.russianriverpoa.org for additional information, updates and presentations

Conserving soil moisture in the profile

Removal of cover crops (except in riparian buffers) will conserve water. This can be achieved by disking, repeated mowing to limit cover crop leaf area, herbicide treatment or a combination of these methods.

Canopy management to provide more shade to the clusters.

Canopy may eliminate or reduce the need for sprinklers for heat suppression. Growers should also prepare for potential heat spikes later in the season.

Management of water release from reservoirs

Growers are working with the Water Agency to manage releases from the reservoirs such that minimum flows are maintained for fish and excess flows are

*The drought-like conditions we are now experiencing require that **we all do our part** to conserve water! The Sonoma WineGrape Commission will hold workshops on water conservation in the vineyards. We strongly urge you to participate and implement recommended measures. We believe that by taking proactive steps to conserve water, the agriculture community not only sets a good example, but also maintains control over its own destiny.*

- Carolyn Wasem

Don't Miss It!

Annual
RRPOA Dinner
Geyserville Grange
March 11th, 2009

Featured Speaker
Kara Eckert
Executive Director
Soyotome Resource
Conservation District

RRPOA Updates

Matt St John, TMDLs and the North Coast Water Quality Control Board

Due to lack of newsletter space we were unable to report on the presentation our second 2008 RRPOA General Membership Meeting Speaker gave us. This speaker was Matt St John - Team Leader - North Coast Water Quality Control Board's TMDL projects.

Matt St John thanked us for inviting him. He is always interested in meeting as many Russian River Property Owners as possible. The TMDL process requires clear communication and transparency to be successful. He urged RRPOA members familiarize themselves about Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs).

A TMDL plan – leads to a “pollution budget” designed to restore the health of a polluted body of water.

For most RRPOA members the Russian River is impaired for human caused Sediment and Temperature. Study of these issues and development of a TMDL Work Plan are now scheduled to begin in 2010. Other areas of the River are impaired for Pathogens, Nitrogen, Phosphorous, Mercury and Dissolved Oxygen. All impairments cause problems for endangered fish.

March 11, 2009 RRPOA General Membership Meeting Speaker Kara Heckert, representing the So-

toyome Resource Conservation District, will include Russian River TMDL's as one of her topics.

RRPOA Stakeholders - stay tuned!

For Agency information go to: NCWQCB: http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/northcoast/water_issues/programs/tmdls/

Matt St John: 707-570-3762 MST.John@waterboard.ca.gov

- Johanna Vannoni

The Coming Water Year

With recent rains, things may change for the better however most farmers have been bracing for an extreme shortage of irrigation water this season. This past month meetings have been held to discuss additional conservation measures above those practiced last year. Most private reservoirs are not nearly full and Lake Mendocino has only months of water available. Not enough to supply agricultural and municipal water users in Northern Sonoma County and Mendocino and still meet regulatory requirements for fish and wildlife. Farmers that rely on stored water or upland wells may experience the greatest shortfall.

The Alexander valley has one of the largest aquifers in the north coast region. Estimates available from the State of California say as much as 500,000 acre/feet of water underlies our valley floor. Recent studies have placed the amount at 750,000 acre/feet. That is one heck of a lot of water, almost 100 times the amount used by agriculture in any one year. What is used, is then replenished by as little as 8 inches of rain in the winter. In fact this aquifer is so rich that there is a net water gain to the river throughout the summer months and late into the fall.

How much effect does agricultural pumping have on the river itself? The precipitous drop in flow seen during last years frost season is exclusively tied to direct pumping in the Ukiah region. Our area showed little if any effect on river flow by our local farmers (6). Certainly pumping adjacent to the Russian River will have some effect. However as the distance is increased from the river so to is the effect diminished. It can take months for water to travel just a few hundred feet to or from the active river channel. The underlying groundwater supports much of the irrigation pumping in Alexander Valley. In addition there is

16,000 acre feet of water stored in Lake Mendocino specifically dedicated to Agricultural use in Northern Sonoma County. While some of it has been appropriated by license, no one has tallied what is the actual remainder.

Can we safely say that we have no effect on the river? No, without studies to back up such a claim, there are no reasons to assume the courts and regulatory agencies would deem agricultural water use as insignificant. That is why just such a study is being lead by the Russian River Property Owners Association. The goal is to adequately predict and report water use, against the stored water available for agriculture in Northern Sonoma County. Coordinating information with SCWA would greatly assist them with meeting their obligations to maintain specific flows in the lower Russian River, and conserve what little stored water we have to begin with.

- Denny Murphy

Message from our President - Water Rights

Dear Members and Friends

There are so many issues going on at present that I find it difficult to decide what to address. I'll start with the positive and perhaps I'll run out of paper before I get to the negative.

The Salmon Coalition is still going strong in spite of serious efforts to break it up. Part of the environmental community feels that because it is made up of mostly private property owners and businesses it cannot be good for their agendas. They fail to acknowledge that more than 90% of the watershed is privately owned.

At present we are attempting to work out a 4 D agreement with National Marine Fisheries Service. This agreement, if accomplished, will provide property owners with incidental take protection.

Not that anyone would intentionally kill a fish, but the definition of take, is quite broad. For example, any adverse modification of critical habitat would constitute a take.

As I understand it, if an organization or an individual should decide that your farming practices could affect fish in a harmful manner, they can file a lawsuit against you. It is not actual take that concerns me. What concerns me is PERCEIVED TAKE.

Who knows what crazy idea someone might come up with?

A 4 D agreement would protect

property owners from this kind of frivolous lawsuit. However, it won't be a free ride.

“ A 4 D agreement would memorialize activities that if undertaken by property owners would provide benefits to the listed salmonids.

Activities covered could range from best management practices specific to agriculture and include water use and restoration projects.”

The good part is, we are already practicing most of these requirements. We just have not publicized it.

I'm afraid that the enviros will be suspicious, and object, but to me it is a win win proposition. The property owner will be protected from frivolous lawsuits and the fish will benefit from our efforts.

Since I mentioned water, perhaps I should delve into that subject a little deeper. {Hope I don't get in over my head!}

In 1977 we had less than 12 inches of rainfall. By August the river flow was approximately 25 cubic feet per second. Lake Mendocino was nearly dry. We irrigated carefully and produced our crops without difficulty. { A note of interest: The water table in Alexander Valley did not lower significantly during that period.} If history repeats this year, what do you think will happen? I can assure you, there will be quite an uproar. There are many more demands for water today than there was

in 1977. There will be demands, finger pointing, and the regulators will have a heyday! And the fish will be a popular tool to be used to promote agendas.

As much as I dislike the idea, I'm afraid that we should take a pro-active position to secure our water needs. I say this on the premise that if we don't do it someone else will do it for us. If we allow that to happen, I don't think the outcome will favor agriculture. We may want to form some kind of a water users association. This could be part of RRPOA or a separate organization.

This will be a very complicated process and we will need to raise funds to pay for professional advice. Again, I say that I do not like being forced into this position, as it will mean more rules and regulations. But I am afraid there is no alternative.

If anyone has an idea on how to accomplish this please feel free to give me a call at 857-4325.

Sorry, I slipped into the negative, but I guess that's part of the positive.

Spring is just around the corner. May it find all of you in good health and in some degree of prosperity.

Regards, Al



Al Cadd, President RRPOA

Become a Member of the RRPOA, Sign up a friend or renew your membership!

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