

# **The OWTS Residents of the Russian River**

**A committee representing the legacy non-sewer-served riverfront communities  
of the lower Russian River ("OWTS-RRR")**

**Jim Christian, resident of Summerhome Park  
Dan Fein, resident of Monte Rio  
Bart Deamer, resident of Northwood  
Candace Healy, President of Northwood Association  
Dave Henderson, President of Fitch Mountain Association  
Kyla Brooke, resident of Villa Grande  
Richard Holmer, resident of Villa Grande  
Sarah Yardley, Hacienda Improvement Association  
Pam Rianda, Hacienda Improvement Association**

August 14, 2017

Charles Reed  
Senior WRC Engineer  
North Coast Water Quality Control Board  
5550 Skylane Blvd., Suite A  
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

RE: Draft Order No. R1-2017-0039, Conditional Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements for Specific  
Categories of Low Threat Discharges in the North Coast Region

Dear Mr. Reed,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the above-referenced draft Order and for your ongoing communications with our Committee. We are in agreement on the goal of clean and safe waters in the Russian River Basin. We offer the following comments on the Order and attachments that pertain to the State OWTS Policy requirement for a minimum of 2 feet separation between the bottom of the effluent dispersal system and groundwater:

1. In the Order, under No. 18, it is stated that this “category waiver will apply only to OWTS for which a replacement OWTS is needed to comply with the OWTS Policy and that were originally constructed and operated prior to the effective date of the OWTS Policy...”  
Please add language stating what the trigger will be for needing replacement to comply with the OWTS Policy, i.e., failure of the existing system or application for a building permit that would trigger up-dating of the OWTS. Staff has reassured us that existing systems that are not failing will not otherwise be required to upgrade. A written statement to this effect will memorialize this assurance.
2. In Attachment A, under “Discharge from Existing Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems with Shallow Effluent Dispersal Systems, the text states that the system must comply with “all other conditions set forth in section 12.0 (Conditional Waiver of Waste Discharge Requirements) of the Basin Plan Policy on the Control of Water Quality with Respect to On-site Waste Treatment and Disposal Practices.” Please clarify that the referenced section 12.0 is in the State OWTS Policy, which will be included by reference in the update to the Basin Plan.
3. In Attachment A, the footnote to the Waiver includes a requirement that discharge be “in accordance with a complete ROWD [Report of Waste Discharge] or equivalent.” Preparation of a ROWD by individual homeowners for installation of a septic system would be unnecessarily burdensome. Given that the

homeowner will be submitting an application for OWTS construction to the permitting agency, please consider accepting that application as the homeowner's ROWD. The RWQCB could instruct the permitting agency as to minimum information required to meet ROWD requirements.

4. We reiterate the request made in our meeting with RWQCB staff on June 21, 2017, that the regulations for the Advanced Protection Management Program (APMP) area of the Russian River watershed include a 2-year continuation of Permit Sonoma's current voluntary upgrade program. This continuation would provide a grace period during which property owners with cesspools or failing septic systems could make voluntary repairs to bring their systems to repair standards under current County regulations for permitted non-conforming OWTS. Systems installed either before or during this grace period would be vested for 20 years or until functional failure, whichever came first. Improvements to OWTS during the grace period would be at Owners' expense, at a lower cost than for improvements under the new regulation and reduce the Agency workload considerably. Benefits would include (1) immediate improvements to ground- and surface-water quality; (2) creation of a reasonable, certain program which owners can act on now; (3) a gradual rather than abrupt transition from old regulations to new; and (4) implementation of regulations now, with reduced angst. This continuation program is consistent with the goal of improved water quality in the Russian River.

We thank you and wish to continue to work with you to make this a successful endeavor.

Sincerely,

The OWTS Residents of the Russian River

CC: Matt St. John, Regional Water Quality Control Board  
Lynda Hopkins, Sonoma County Supervisor, District 5  
James Gore, Sonoma County Supervisor, District 4  
Tennis Wick, Permit Sonoma