

Tuesday, July 5, 2011

To whom it may concern:

Hello, My name is John Mearns. I am 55 years old, and have been fishing on the Big Sur River since I was 7 years old. My family has been in the area for nearly 100 years. My Grandfather Arthur B. Ingham was principal at Pacific Grove High School for nearly 30 years, and served on the School Board into his 90s. As a child, my family would come to Big Sur to go camping and fishing. Me, my brother and sister would fish with my father and we would catch many trout. I remember seeing from 20 to 50 leftover adult Steelhead in some of the deeper holes, during the Summer months, and as a kid, I longed to catch one of those bigger Steelhead, but was never successful at that time in my life.

At about age 21 or so, I got the bug to pursue and catch Steelhead on the Carmel River, and was successful at it. Occasionally my friends and I would make the trip South to fish the Little Sur and Big Sur rivers, which were both legal and open for Steelhead fishing during the Steelhead season. These rivers were nice because of the lack of pressure from other anglers, and we would usually have the whole river to ourselves. In the mid 70s my family purchased 40 acres in Big Sur, and in 1984, I moved onto the property which has been my place of residence ever since. It was from that time on, that I really became acquainted with the Big Sur River. In those days I would average from 10 to 30 Steelhead per year, depending on conditions during the Winter season. In 1987, my son Ryan was born, and he would often be on my back in his little backpack baby seat. As Ryan grew to where he could walk, I got him one of those little Donald Duck fishing rods that he quickly mastered casting with, and with a little help from me tying and baiting his hook, he was catching his own trout, all by himself. This was before he was even 3 years old. He has since grown into a young man, and has 2 new sons of his own now, who I look forward to fishing with in the near future.

Through the years, I have seen many changes on the Big Sur River. In those early days in the 80s there was an extended drought period that lasted I believe almost 7 years. During those years, the Steelhead were under extreme pressure from anglers. This was due to pressure from the Anglers who normally would be fishing on the Carmel River, coming to fish Big Sur because the Carmel had no water in it from lack of rain, and part of which was due to Cal Am wells along the Carmel River. With no water, the mouth would not open so no Steelhead were able to migrate up the Carmel to spawn. During some of those drought years, the Carmel River Steelhead Association was able artificially open the mouth of the river, and capture several adult Steelhead, which they were able to help spawn them out and raise the Steelhead fry in doughboy swimming pools to later be released back into the wild. With the added fishing pressure during those drought years on the Big Sur, the Steelhead were hit hard back in the days of Catch and Kill. We definitely put some pressure on those poor fish in those days. Later would come natural, and un-natural hardships for the Steelhead. Whether it be from forest fires, or Fish and Game doing so called fish counting with fish weirs and traps along the Big Sur during it's Winter months. I used to find dead steelhead in their weirs, and I could never understand

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how this could be helping these fish right after all those drought years of high fishing pressure. Now with back to normal rainfalls here was Fish and Game killing fish in their debris clogged traps and weirs during high water.

In later years we would finally end the Catch and Kill fishing and replace it with Catch and Release. My fish caught per year has gone down from those early years, and gone to around 1 to 13 fish per year. The last 3 or 4 years I have been lucky to catch from 1 to 4 adult fish per year. A lot of which has been due to situations following the Fires of 2008, and high water during the Steelhead season. The Big Sur River lagoon is a sensitive Steelhead nursery for juvenile fish, and the water levels could be affected drastically by any new well developments in this lower river area. Already, there exists water pumping that I believe depletes the needed water from this delicate Steelhead Nursery. It is my understanding that the Big Sur River was declared a Wild and Scenic River, and that the Steelhead are declared in a threatened state as it is now. Why is there even any question as to allowing further water depleting pumping to be approved on the lower Big Sur? The El Sur Ranch has seemed to do just fine through the years with the water they are already allowed to take from the Big Sur River watershed. Why would they need more? Does Jim Hill have ulterior motives to develop more water resources for his property? Who knows? Please give careful thought to these questions.

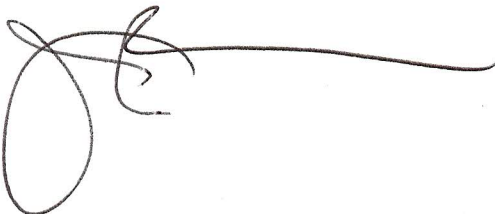
I look forward to fishing the Big Sur with my Son, Daughter and my 2 Grandsons in the future, and once the Big Sur River Steelhead are gone, that won't be possible. Please protect the Big Sur River and it's beautiful, already stressed Steelhead population by NOT granting approval of further well development by the El Sur Ranch.

Thank you for your time.

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