

JIM CUNNINGHAM ~~POLICY~~ STATEMENT

Good morning I would like to thank the Board for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is James G. Cunningham Sr. I have live in Monterey California for 69 of my 74 years. I worked for Cortland Hill on the El Sur Ranch for three years as an exterior telephone line repairman. I worked for 4 years on what was then called the Dani Ranch before it became Molera State Park working for Bud Nelson. For Mr. Nelson I helped with the cattle operation and was a patrolman. I fished the Big Sur River for 60 years. I hunted the Big Sur area including the Molera ranch and the El Sur Ranch for 15 years. Because of all of this I am very familiar with both sides of the Big Sur River.

These hearings are to determine if the El Sur Ranch should be granted a right to water from the Big Sur River. Why are we even considering granting further withdrawals of water from a river that is designated as a Wild and Scenic River and has several listed species living in it, most notably Steelhead? While all species are important, steelhead have a special place in the minds and souls of a lot of people. In the past steelhead were economically important to the businesses of the Big Sur area.

Having fished the Big Sur for these many years I will discuss the Big Sur both past and present. In the earlier years, I saw thousands of steelhead in the Big Sur and caught hundreds; 78 fish being the most I caught in one year and 40 to 60 fish being an average year, but those days are long gone. Today it is difficult to even see a steelhead let alone catch one. The steelhead run has always been and always will be greatly affected both by the amount and purity of the water. The amount of water or lack of does have devastating consequences on the steelhead population.

In the past, I fished occasionally during trout season. While trout season was from the first of May until the end of October, I only fished trout from August to the end of October. When I was fishing for trout I caught steelhead from 1½ to 6 pounds. These were bright fish and had spawn or sperm. This period was from the 50's through the 60's. During that period I also landed an occasional Silver Salmon. I caught anywhere from 2 to 16 of these small steelhead during the 3 month period.

Once steelhead season opened in December my fishing buddy and I would start fishing the lower river and the lagoon. While trying to catch adult fish we would observe thousands of smolt flipping out of the water in the lagoon only to move out to the ocean during low tide and return on the incoming tide. In later years we noticed the number of smolt diminish significantly. Unfortunately, this decline continues today.

On Monday July 4, 2011 I visited the Big Sur. I walked the lower part of the river to the lagoon. On this day, I wanted to see the water conditions were. I was very distraught at what the river looked like now compared to what it looked like in my earlier years and even more distraught considering this was an above average year of rainfall. In past years you would have needed hip boots if not chest waders to cross the river. Now, I could cross it with the deepest point being 10 inches. Other than wanting to see the water conditions and compare it to past years I also wanted to see if I could still find juvenile steelhead. I spent three hours walking most of the lagoon and even tossed rocks into the deeper parts in an attempt to see fish moving. I also walked the north side of the lagoon along the willows to look into the deeper parts. Where once I would have seen multiple hundreds of juveniles I only saw 5 or 6. The lack of juvenile steelhead was even more disturbing.

During my time working on the El Sur Ranch and the Dani Ranch, hunting on both ranches, and fishing the Big Sur I plainly saw the operation of the El Sur ranch. All that time I did not see the operation of the cattle ranch or permanent pasture change appreciably. During my 60 years of observations I have not seen the El Sur cattle operation change in numbers or procedures. With or without the permanent pasture the limiting factor on the El Sur Ranch is not the summer pasture, but the winter pasture. Adding unlimited water to the permanent pasture will not increase the efficiency of the ranch because that water will not increase feed on the winter pasture. I have never seen the El Sur Ranch do anything with the permanent pasture other than water it and run cows on it. I have never seen it mowed or harvested in any manor nor have I seen it reseeded.

Members of the Board, your decision in this matter could affect the fish in the Big Sur River for years to come. Again, this is always about water or the lack of it. In my humble opinion the continued drawdown of the Big Sur River will guarantee the extinction of steelhead. I would hope the decision this board makes would not further affect the beauty of the area, the special nature of Big Sur, or the native run of steelhead on the river. This Board has

the power and responsibility to render a decision that preserves all of the public resources and not just the economic fortunes of one landowner.