



Division of Water Rights
State Water Resources Control Board
Attention: Paul Murphy
P.O. Box 2000
Sacramento, CA 95812-2000

June 9, 2011

Subject: Big Sur River Hearing

Dear Mr. Murphy:

My name is Frank Pinney, and I have been a resident of Big Sur since September, 1972. I was educated at Phillips Exeter Academy, attended the United States Naval Academy, and graduated from the University of the South at Sewanee, Tennessee with a degree in Political Science. I have served as an infantry officer in the United States Marine Corps, been IBM account representative to Headquarters, Marine Corps in Washington, D.C. during the Vietnam era, and national sales manager of a publicly owned software company headquartered in Chicago.

In 1972 I came to live in Big Sur, where my wife and I have founded and operated two different small businesses, birthed and raised our children, participated in the community and been blessed with the gift of living where we have wanted to live for almost four decades. Two years after I arrived, and in response to losing several homes to fire in a short period of time, the community formed the Big Sur Volunteer Fire Brigade. I joined up immediately, serving as Training Officer during the first few years of operation. Thirty-five years later, I retired, one year following the devastating Basin Complex Fire, where our community fought to survive the most devastating fire on the Big Sur Coast in over 100 years. I had served 14 years as chief, including participation as Incident Commander in the 1998 El Nino emergency, and on the Unified Command of several emergencies including the Basin Complex. I have had the unique privilege of working closely with the residents, businesses and agencies that have contributed services and resources to support the community in the continuing challenge to living on the coast. I tell you this to inform you of the importance of community to me and to my family, and of the importance we place on participation in the life of the community to help assure its survival in the face of fire, flood, landslides and road closures.

Over the years I have lived here, the El Sur Ranch and its ownership have supported and participated in all of the major emergencies the community has faced, including the El Nino winters of 1972, 1983 and 1998, and numerous fires including the Molera Fires, Marble Cone, Gorda Rat, Sur Fire, Kirk Complex, Basin Complex and too many smaller fires to be able to name. Of the major land holdings that make up the viewshed between Carmel and the Big Sur Valley, one of the least changed is the El Sur Ranch, which still reflects the spirit of the working ranch

established there in the nineteenth century and its context with the adjacent federally managed wilderness area and the Andrew Molera State Park

During the past two decades, Jim Hill has provided through the Ranch and the company he founded, North Tree Fire International, support to the community on numerous levels through direct and indirect involvement of his resources in the prevention and suppression of fires that have threatened the coast from Hurricane Point to the south county line. He has made his ranch and its personnel available to support the Big Sur Volunteer Fire Brigade in direct fire suppression activities, which include providing water, water tender, drivers and staging areas on the property for both the local department and for the Incident Commands of the major fires. Ranch employees have driven Brigade apparatus when needed and provided equipment from the Ranch when called for. Jim Hill has helped the Brigade to such a degree over the years that he has been named an Honorary Life Member. The El Sur Ranch has demonstrated its commitment to community as an active member of the Monterey Fire Safe Council, contributing hundreds of hours of time and effort in the preparation of the Monterey County Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The Ranch played a leading role in obtaining the NRCS grant funding of recovery programs following the Basin Complex Fire, assisting other land owners in developing treatments to control landslides and erosion following that wildfire.

Because the Ranch is adjacent to the Andrew Molera State Park, it is subject to numerous trespassing campers and hikers, and fires starting on Molera burn onto the Ranch. Illegal fires from campers trespassing on the Ranch have spread to the park and neighboring lands as well. The Ranch is a willing and proactive player in the intricate balance between public access to recreation and emergencies that arise as a result of careless citizens in the wildland urban interface. Fire fighters and equipment stage in the irrigated pastures, and air support of fire suppression operations use the Ranch open space for a heli-base. We are concerned that if the water right permit is not approved to continue historic irrigation of the pasturelands, the planted grasses will be lost, and without the irrigated grasses to keep down dust, expensive efforts and water will be required to prevent dust from grounding the helicopters. Eventually, the pasture will be overrun by invasive species and brush, as may be seen on the adjoining Andrew Molera State Park. Such conditions would preclude the staging of fire camps and equipment on the Ranch, depriving the Big Sur Community of physical and logistical support that has been critical to fire fighting. Moreover, such vegetation conditions can themselves present a fuel-laden fire hazard. Beyond these consequences, without irrigation the El Sur Ranch operation is unlikely to remain financially viable and could cease. The end of the El Sur Ranch as a working cattle ranch in the Big Sur Community would be a huge loss on many levels, especially in the loss of the Ranch as a vital partner in responding to natural disasters.

I urge the members of the Board to consider these community-based, public safety and environmental factors in your deliberations, and respectfully request that you approve the continued use of water as requested for the support of the El Sur Ranch operations and for the benefit of the public and the entire Big Sur Community.

Respectfully,


Frank Pinney
Chief Emeritus