

PBM



DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY AND FIRE PROTECTION

2221 Garden Road
 MONTEREY, CA 93940
 (831) 333-2600
 Website: www.fire.ca.gov



May 29, 2011

State Water Resources Control Board
 Division of Water Rights
 Attn: Paul Murphey
 Post Office Box 2000
 Sacramento, California 95812-2000

RE: **Big Sur River Hearing**

Dear Mr. Murphey;

The area of irrigated pasture land of the El Sur Ranch provides usable area to provide critical support to equipment and personnel during emergencies, including fires and medical emergencies. Fire fighters and equipment stage in the irrigated pastures. If historic land management practices are curtailed to a degree that loss of irrigated pastureland results, the suitability of the area currently used to stage ground and aerial fire fighting operations and medical helicopters will be seriously compromised.

Without the irrigated grasses to keep down dust, expensive efforts and valuable water will be required to prevent dust from creating visibility problems which could ultimately make helicopter operations unsafe in this area. These efforts will be costly, time consuming, hard on the land and due to environmental concerns could be precluded. Eventually, the pasture will be overrun by invasive species and brush, as may be seen on the adjoining Andrew Molera State Park. If this were to happen it 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 vegetative conditions can themselves present a fuel-laden fire hazard. The area would become useless for our emergency operational needs. Support and emergency operations would need to be conducted as far away as the Carmel Valley to the north and Fort Hunter Liggett to the south. Either of these options would result in extended travel and reaction times into the Big Sur area for both ground and air resources which could adversely effect our ability to mitigate emergencies.

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. For example, if helicopters cannot dip into the fresh water tailwater pond, they must dump salt water on the forest, with all the attendant adverse environmental effects or fill from distant water sources again resulting in increased reaction times. But from my perspective as Chief of the San Benito - Monterey Unit for CAL FIRE, I am particularly sensitive to the loss of the ranch as a vital partner in responding to natural disasters.

Sincerely,

RICHARD C. HUTCHINSON JR.
 Unit Chief

CONSERVATION IS WISE-KEEP CALIFORNIA GREEN AND GOLDEN

PLEASE REMEMBER TO CONSERVE ENERGY. FOR TIPS AND INFORMATION, VISIT "FLEX YOUR POWER" AT WWW.CA.GOV.

DIVISION OF WATER RIGHTS
 2011 JUN -6 AM 9:44