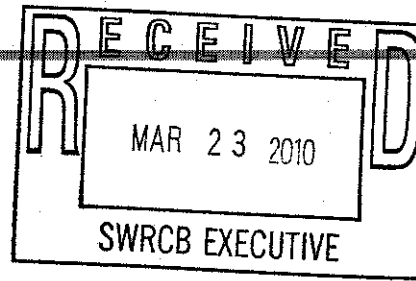


commentletters - SWRCB policies and the Sea Ranch



From: "chris kenber" <ckenber@sbcglobal.net>
To: <commentletters@waterboards.ca.gov>
Date: 3/23/2010 4:30 PM
Subject: SWRCB policies and the Sea Ranch
CC: <ecarrillo@sonoma-county.org>

As a result of AB2121, passed in 2004, the SWRCB is considering regulations that could have a catastrophic impact on the Sea Ranch, an isolated northern Sonoma community, if adopted as currently understood. The policy proposed by SWRCB staff will cause substantial economic and living standard damage to the Sea Ranch with little if any resulting benefits. It is hard to believe that the Sea Ranch is unique - I suspect there are other communities that will have the same problem. The policy in question is intended to enhance in stream flows in the north coast region, which includes the Gualala River, immediately north of the Sea Ranch and the source of all Sea Ranch water.

The SWRCB staff-recommended proposed policy could have a drastic impact on the Sea Ranch. It could leave the Sea Ranch without water supply for extended periods each year. The proposed policy should be revised to require that the economic impacts on current water users be taken into account. The policy should be evaluated by including burden as well as benefit. Water needed for the Sea Ranch should not be re-dedicated to in stream flow, especially when it is not even needed for that purpose.

The Regional Criteria would limit the diversion season to December 15 - March 31. We are operating our wells in accordance with regulations and long practice, diverting from the aquifer underlying the South Fork Gualala River, year-round as long as river flows are within the permitted range. We adhere rigorously to the required water volume bypass flows for fish protection, and typically operate the wells from December to July, although in the 2008-2009 drought, pumping didn't begin until February 2009.

The proposed policy would require historically high flows in the South Fork Gualala River before we could operate our wells. The flows would have to be about 10 times greater than the current permitted policies. The effects during drought will include very severe conservation measures. Even with such measures in place, our reservoir is likely to dry up quickly after March 31 and is unlikely to be refilled if drought continues. The Sea Ranch has an excellent water conservation program and very low gallons per capita per day usage.

There is no economically feasible work-around to this proposed policy. Additionally the proposed policy does not take into account the hydrology of the Gualala River nor the primary threats to fish. The policy has not been validated for the Gualala River, but is aimed at inland conditions far different than ours. The policy has no basis in science applicable specifically to the Gualala River watershed or to our pumping from the aquifer within this watershed.

The proposed policy would permit the Sea Ranch to present site specific studies as an alternative. The stated guidelines for developing site specific alternatives appear to require studies equivalent to environmental impact studies under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). To have scientific integrity, such studies would cost about \$1 million. Further, there is no provision to take into account impacts on the Sea Ranch, while the criteria remain focused exclusively on fish and in stream flow.

The Sea Ranch (homeowners) Association and the Water Company believe the proposed policy should be revised to require that the economic and other impacts to current water users be taken into account. The policy should be evaluated by including burden as well as benefit. Further, the policy should employ science that addresses conditions like those found on the South Fork of the Gualala River. We urge the SWRCB to reconsider this policy and to make adjustments that will allow the Sea Ranch to continue to get its water from the Gualala River under the same requirements that it has adhered to in the past.

Chris Kenber
Sea Ranch resident
ckember@sbcglobal.net
(925)743-0387 Office/ fax
(925)787-0962 Cell
(925)838-2296 Home