

Russian River CURRENTS

Friends of the Russian River/Russian Riverkeeper

Summer 2002

Friends of the Russian River's newest project, the Russian Riverkeeper was launched on February 27th with the help of Robert F. Kennedy Jr., the president of the international Waterkeeper Alliance. The day included a press conference at Healdsburg's Memorial Beach and an evening Launch Party benefit at Trentadue Winery.

Roughly 60 people attended the afternoon press conference which featured Kennedy, river activists Brenda Adelman and Dr. Martin Griffin, Assemblywoman Pat Wiggins, public resource agency officials and Sonoma County Deputy DA for environmental affairs, Jeffrey Holtzman.

The following article is reprinted with permission from the "North Bay Progressive," March 21-April 3 Issue.

ROBERT F. KENNEDY, JR. ANNOUNCES "RIVERKEEPER" PROJECT

By Chris Salvano

On February 27, Robert F. Kennedy Jr. held a press conference at Healdsburg's Memorial Beach to announce the start of the Russian River "Riverkeeper" project. The project is designed to have group of community volunteers work with official "Riverkeeper" Don McEnhill to monitor and document Russian River activities. The group plans to report any local, state and federal violations it finds against the public trust of the river if necessary. "It's not about protecting fish and birds in their own right," said Kennedy, "it's about our environment as infrastructure ...for the sake of our community."

About 60 people attended the press conference to hear Kennedy who is the president of the national WaterKeeper Alliance organization. Among the attendees were many river and environmental advocates including Brenda Adelman and Dr. Marty Griffin who joined Kennedy on stage. Several local politicians attended including Assemblymember Pat Wiggins, Rohnert Park councilmember Jake MacKenzie and Windsor councilmember Debora Fudge. Assembly candidate Patty Berg was present and supervisor candidate Fred Euphrat introduced Kennedy.

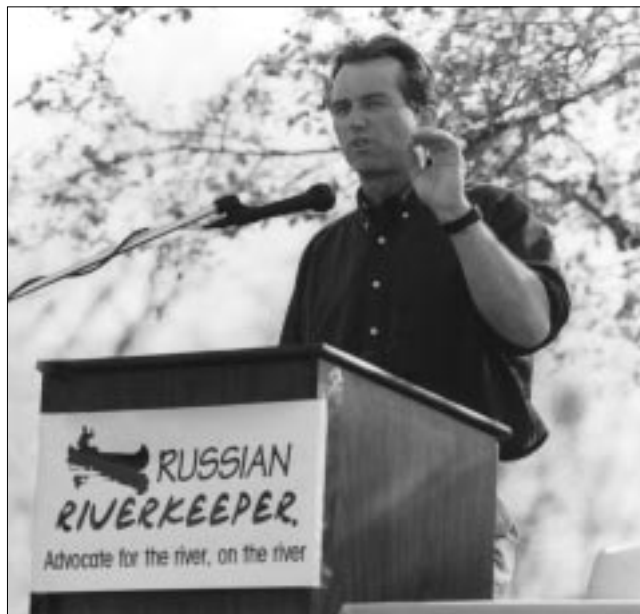


Photo: Peeter Vilms

RFK Jr. drives a point home at Memorial Beach press conference.

The Russian Riverkeeper "will be watchdogs for the public, not lapdogs," claimed Euphrat to loud applause.

Kennedy began by describing how the WaterKeeper Alliance began with its first Riverkeeper program on the Hudson River. A group of blue-collar workers, many of whom were former Marines, organized the community because they were ashamed of seeing the Hudson River banks blackened with oil leaks. They viewed the river as an asset with value and as part of their community. Since that initial Riverkeeper project started there have been over 300 successful legal actions against Hudson River polluters.

"Today, the Hudson River is one of the richest bodies of water in the North Atlantic," said Kennedy. "There is more biomass per gallon and more fish per acre than any body of water in the North Atlantic. Tourists have come back," he added, "and property values have increased and waterfront towns are thriving again."

Kennedy then turned attention here to Sonoma County and commented that "we are reasserting public control of this waterway." He addressed the issue of some people in the

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River Appreciation Festival !

September 15th, 3-6pm, Hop Kiln Winery
Reservations and info call 578-0595
See Page 7 for details!

Friends of the Russian River is a non-profit coalition of river and conservation groups whose mission is to preserve, restore and enhance the natural systems of the Russian River, its tributaries, riparian corridors and uplands through citizen action, scientific research and expert advocacy.

Russian Riverkeeper is a project of FORR. The Riverkeeper's duty is to:

- Advocate compliance with environmental laws
- Respond to citizen complaints
- Identify problems which affect the Russian River
- Devise appropriate remedies to address problems
- Identify practices which support health of Russian River

FORR Board of Directors:

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RIVERKEEPER LOG – SO FAR!

Sometimes it pays to look back and see what we've done to remind ourselves that progress is being made even as the task ahead is ever growing and seems endless. Time to stop and look at what we've done over the last year. Our progress to date is the result of the contributions of the FORR Board and Riverkeeper Steering Committee and the many dedicated and enthusiastic volunteers and supporters.

THE RUSSIAN RIVERKEEPER PROJECT HAS ALREADY:

- Applied and been accepted into the Waterkeeper Alliance for the Russian Riverkeeper project
- Raised funding to hire a full-time Keeper, obtain equipment and written future grant applications
- Made use of a generous donation from RREF for our first patrol boat – the *Russian-keeper 1*
- Established Riverkeeper protocols, response policies and workplan
- Produced a program brochure for Riverkeeper
- Submitted comments to water quality board urging 303(d) listing of the Russian River for 7 pollutants
- Assisted the research into Santa Rosa's Geysers Pipeline project by local groups
- Submitted comments for biennial review of Regional Water Quality Board's Basin Plan
- Submitted comments in support of Waterkeepers effort to regulate agricultural run-off
- Set-up schedule for patrol of mainstem Russian
- Created a database to track incidents to resolution for further investigation
- Set up water testing program with UNC (see article) & developing our own testing capability
- Launched our website: www.russianriverkeeper.org, check it out!

WE NEED YOUR HELP TO SUSTAIN OUR RIVERKEEPER PROJECT!!

We are off to a great start but like any new program we need all the help we can get to put us on sound financial footing. Although we are affiliated with the National Waterkeepers Alliance, we get no financial support from them. Each "keeper" program is expected to be able to rely on local financial support. Please give what you can and help FORR keep the Riverkeeper project afloat! *Contact us to learn more about opportunities to participate as a founding donor or be a member of the King Salmon Club!*

WATER MONITORING PROGRAM SLATED FOR FALL LAUNCH!

An exciting and important element to the Russian Riverkeeper effort is our volunteer water quality monitoring program. We have been invited to participate in a low cost testing program with University of North Carolina's Environmental Quality Institute, a national leader in this type of water quality monitoring.

Planned for an October 2002 launch, this testing will examine 11 key water quality indicators on a monthly basis to determine baseline information for tributaries threatened by proposed development and establish several locations on the mainstem of the Russian River for long-term trend analysis.

Marmot Mountain Ltd., will be donating proceeds from a sample sale in August, which will be earmarked for our testing program on the mainstem. We will be working with the Episcopal Bishop's Ranch who will help fund testing to establish baseline conditions for Turtle Creek and other tributaries threatened by proposed wastewater storage reservoirs.

In addition, the Sonoma County Water Agency's Fisheries Enhancement Program has provided us with much needed equipment for gathering data on temperature and suspected nutrient problems, which can lead to low levels of dissolved oxygen, which is detrimental to the endangered Salmonids in the watershed.

We are still accepting volunteers to make this program happen. Participants in the monitoring program will be asked to commit to two training sessions prior to getting out on the River, then one day a month for ongoing sampling and testing.

If you are interested in participating in this important environmental monitoring effort, please contact us at info@russianriverkeeper.org

SANTA ROSA'S RECYCLED WASTEWATER

At the 2001 Russian River Environmental Forum, the late Dick Day stood up and said, "The biggest threat facing the Russian River watershed is Santa Rosa." His wisdom was true then and even more so now. Santa Rosa is presently conducting the EIR process for their "Incremental Recycled (WASTE)-Water Program," a system that will profoundly impact the Russian River for years to come. Looming large in the list of alternatives is RIVER DISCHARGE above and below Healdsburg via the Geysers Pipeline. While the Geysers project was touted as a means to end river discharge, it will now be used to continue river discharge.

The Geysers Recharge Project will take some 4 billion gallons a year, leaving an average of 3.7 BILLION gallons a year to be discharged to the Russian River or for agricultural reuse – both via the "geysers" pipeline. It is worth noting that these discharges would take place above the intakes for the Sonoma County Water Agency wells, which supply drinking water to much of the region, and those of the cities of Healdsburg and Windsor.

FORR has several reservations about this plan. First, while Santa Rosa tells the public the treated sewage is as good as swimming pool water, they are telling the Water Quality Board they will have trouble meeting requirements posed by the California Toxics Rule, which adds 120 new toxic chemicals that sewage plants must test for and in some cases completely remove. The California Toxics Rule (CTR) is intended to protect public health as well as the environment.

How does Santa Rosa plan to deal with the problem of toxic substances in the wastewater? By lobbying for "mixing zones" to be allowed (for the first time on the North Coast) so that they can exceed allowable levels of toxic compounds in certain stretches of the Russian River! Rather than protect public health by finding the means to comply with the CTR, Santa Rosa will threaten public health by lobbying for mixing zones.

Let's be clear, mixing zones are not a means to comply with the Cal Toxics Rule but rather a loophole to get around protecting public health. Mixing zones use dilution as the solution to pollution, but dilution doesn't remove toxic pollutants; they will still go into the river above our drinking water intakes. Santa Rosa says the costs to comply with CTR are too high and standards imposed too vague for them to implement. How much is it worth to provide a high level of protection for our drinking water or the endangered salmonids in the Russian?

FORR is also concerned about the long-term effects of irrigating valuable vineyard land with wastewater. There is some question about whether the wastewater is suitable for irrigating vineyards at all. In other parts of the state, build up of toxic elements, notably heavy metals, phosphorous and selenium, such as are present in Santa Rosa's wastewater, have permanently damaged or destroyed valuable ag lands. The largest vineyard owner in the county was quoted in the PD as saying the wastewater isn't suitable for grape vines. Just in the short term imagine the marketing problems associated with selling premium wine from grapes grown with wastewater.

From a financial perspective the ag-reuse scheme stinks as well. A \$50 million price tag is being discussed to dig up the streets of the Healdsburg area again and build a system of wastewater storage reservoirs. Considering how the Geysers project bill went from \$80 million when proposed to over \$200 million now, the \$50 million Ag reuse price tag is probably way too low.

So are there other alternatives that make better sense? For years, Santa Rosa has ignored public requests that they investigate sub-surface irrigation of forests on some of the thousands of acres they own or lease in the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

Such forest treatment systems have been dem-



Above: The Geysers Pipeline under construction near The Russian River & Hwy. 101.

Right: The Geysers Pipeline Project ... "out of the waterway?"



Photo: Don McEnhill

Photo: Don McEnhill

onstrated to provide superior removal of toxic substances from wastewater, while protecting the ground water and river-based water supplies. Redwoods, for example, also cure the problem of excess wastewater in rainy months as they take up water even when it is raining, unlike the grass they grow in the Laguna now. When mature, the trees can be harvested, providing significant financial return, due to rapid growth rates in such forests. The cost of implementing such a project would be less than the ag-reuse option and be less disruptive. Carbon trading credits for planting redwoods can be sold as well generating immediate revenue to help offset ratepayer's bills.

For more information visit Santa Rosa's website www.recycledwaterprogram.com or contact us about how you can participate in this monumental decision that will affect the Russian River for years to come.

TRASH (CRAP, SNAPPLE, POP)

by Fred Euphrat



Photo: Don McEnhill

I don't wonder where trash comes from.
It always has a name.
I read the labels as I go by,
as I stoop down or when the girls bring me
another piece.

Some labels are now mere whispers of their proud,
original blare.
Some still cry for attention.

If found, don't forget
Budweiser or
Safeway or
Jack in the Box or
Coke.

Please drop in the nearest receptacle and say
MickeyD or
MGD or
Payless or
Save-More.

Count the pieces in the bag
Two for 1, or
Third one Free, or
Food 4 less, or
Seven Eleven...

I want to help, but I'm quickly put off by

Nasty looking trash
with toxic sounding names
Chevron or
Shell or
Dow or
GE.

I beware especially of
cans with no bottom
still mysteriously deep in goo,
waiting to be my problem
when I bend down to pick em up.

Unnamed trash is still easily found, and
sometimes gives greater hazard, like
broken glass or
clamshell closures with mysterious contents.

Don't even think about the
hard-to-move trash
languishing and lurking
on our rivers' shores
and parking in our valleys.
Dodges down draws,
Buick bank supports,
Delco batteries and
and Westinghouse lamps.

The crushed cars on the riverbeds have
heavy steel corroding, with the sharp bits jutting out,
the soft parts oozing out,
the little parts trailing out.
But they're still considered, by some,
legitimate, to save the banks from the river.

So the sand of the river tries to cover the trash up
and the plants of the ditches try to grow in it,
over it and through it.
The soil embraces it.
The pillbugs chew it.
The slugs slime it.
The ants look for what they can get.

In the woods I've seen trash piles that go back years.
I know they'll impress future archaeologists...
who will say...judging from the garbage,
it appears they were a Very Thirsty Race.

So...when we go to the river,
to the free beach
we take a bag every time.
We try to fill it...and make the place better.
We get to help out a little bit, and
it honestly feels better.

But, sometimes the trash is so gross
or sharp
or stinky
or spreading from the wind,
we're stunned into helplessness from futility.

We stand there, reading the scene,
looking for a handle,
looking for a reason,
and reading.....all those names.

*Fred Euphrat's Native Sonoma is presented on
KRCB Radio 91.1 and 90.9 FM, Santa Rosa, California, USA
wed 6:35, 8:35, and 6:30 pm • sat 1 pm
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