



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

Southwest Region
777 Sonoma Avenue, Room 325
Santa Rosa, California 95404

August 22, 2006

Supervisor Paul Kelley, Chairman
Board of Supervisors
575 Administration Drive, Room 100A
Santa Rosa, California 95403

Dear Chairman Kelly:

The purpose of this letter is to inform you on the progress of an ongoing collaborative effort here in Sonoma County aimed at salmon and steelhead conservation, and protection and restoration of salmonid habitat. This collaborative process may have direct applicability to the County's General Plan Update process that is ongoing.

As you know, the Sonoma county Water Agency has been participating in a collaborative effort with representatives of NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries), the California Department of Fish and Game, environmental interests, agricultural interests, and local development interests to develop a comprehensive strategy and program aimed at conservation and recovery of listed salmonid species. Known as the Sonoma County Salmon Coalition, the effort was initiated in late 2005 by Kendall Jackson Winery and their consultants Kelly and Wasem. The Coalition has brought these stakeholders together to develop a comprehensive strategy and conservation plan for salmon and steelhead. I am personally excited about the progress and possibilities, that with land-owner support, this effort could result in real meaningful conservation measures, based on sound science, to protect and restore important salmonid habitat in Sonoma County.

Originally the paramount interest was to remove the Critical Habitat designation on land in Sonoma County by providing alternative habitat protections. Removal of the Critical Habitat designation in some areas may still be an end result, but this is no longer the primary focus of the Coalition. At a minimum, in exchange for development and implementation of a conservation plan for areas in Alexander Valley, Dry Creek Valley and Knight's Valley, Coalition landowners will receive some sort of "regulatory certainty" from National Marine Fisheries Service. What form this will take is not clear at this time, but there are several viable options, and there is a level of trust established among Coalition participants that keeps this effort moving forward.

This collaborative conservation effort may also have application to the County's General Plan update process. Riparian setbacks are turning out to be highly contentious as Sonoma County works through the General Plan update process. Riparian areas are an



important natural resource, and their conservation will require sound policy and some tough decisions. In collaboration with the Sonoma county Salmon Coalition, NOAA Fisheries will soon be conducting watershed assessments to focus on specific conservation needs, and develop plans that can help landowners accomplish conservation goals. An expected outcome of this effort will be Best Management Practices (BMP's), based on sound science and site specific conditions, to reduce sedimentation into streams and to protect riparian habitat values. Through the Coalition's process, NOAA Fisheries will benefit from assurances that riparian habitats needing protection will be protected. This collaborative approach is attractive because the conservation recommendations will be site specific, and have some level of buy-in from the landowners. The Salmon Coalition's program and BMP's could be expanded to other areas, and adopted by the County as a foundation for its riparian protections.

I anticipate that the BMP's and conservation measures will be developed and available within six months to a year. If the General Plan update process can be adapted to accommodate that timeline, benefits of the Salmon Coalition's programs could serve to inform the General Plan update with current science and baseline.

I appreciate the fact that Sonoma County is a supportive partner in NOAA Fisheries' efforts to conserve and recover listed salmonid species. If you have questions or comments about this letter, please call me at (707) 575-6058.

Sincerely,



Dick Butler
Santa Rosa Area Office Supervisor
Protected Resources Division

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