



Fact Sheet Regarding RUSSIAN RIVER ESTUARY MANAGEMENT PROJECT

What is the Russian River Estuary Project?

The Russian River Estuary Project (estuary project) is a project by the Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA) that has been approved and will be implemented next summer. The SCWA has been directed to do this project based upon a Biological Opinion developed by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). The NMFS has concluded that maintenance of estuary conditions at Jenner will improve habitat for salmon and steelhead.

The project consists of construction and maintenance of an outlet channel at the mouth of the river between May 15 and October 15 after the river mouth has closed naturally. The project will maintain the height of the river at 7 to 9 feet as measured at Jenner and will limit water flow into the ocean so that the outlet channel does not breach. This outlet channel construction will cause the river to back up as far as Vacation Beach (across from George's Hideaway) and will eliminate the free flow of the river through the summer months. This will result in the river becoming an estuary instead of the free flowing river that we normally experience.

What are the impacts to Patterson Point Preserve?

When the river at Jenner reaches a height of seven feet, the sandy beach at PPP and the gravel bar in front of it are completely inundated with only a small portion of the sandy hill above the beach remaining. The gravel beach is inundated up to the area where our canoes are stored. At nine feet, the gravel beach is completely under water.

When the river mouth was closed in the past, monitoring by the County and SCWA showed elevated bacterial counts at Monte Rio Beach. Neither the County nor SCWA monitors the Patterson Point beaches. Also, during river mouth closures, there is a visible decrease in water clarity, an increase in floating scum and increased algae growth. The EIR for the estuary project states that brackish (salty) water conditions may be created upstream as far as Monte Rio during extended mouth closures.

These conditions severely impact the use of Patterson Point Preserve for recreational purposes. The loss of our beach areas limits sunbathing and exacerbates beach crowding. The deterioration in water quality could cause contamination levels to reach a point where swimming and other water contact is inadvisable.

The changes also impact fish and wildlife. The increase in contaminants has unknown (but probably not good) impacts to fish. The increase in salinity will severely impact fish at PPP both in the numbers and in the variety. It is likely that the heavier salt water will settle into the deep hole off of the gravel beach and remain even after the mouth reopens.

What is Friends of Villa Grande doing about this project?

Members of FoVG have proposed modifications to the project which include a maximum water level of 5 to 7 feet at Jenner and increased river monitoring, to include Patterson Point. The SCWA has rejected these modifications. The FoVG Board will continue to push for modifications to the project in order to preserve our recreational beaches. If you would like to participate, please contact any Board member.