

be loaded back into the water through nitrogen fixation by blooms of obnoxious blue-green algae downstream of the discharge. The consultants hired by Santa Rosa have literally flushed millions of ratepayer dollars down the toilet through their ignorance.

Interestingly, no evidence, either then or now, has ever demonstrated a definitive connection to septic discharges in the lower river communities, despite the continued misinformation provided by the Regional Board, County environmental health, the City of Santa Rosa or its propaganda tool, the Press Democrat. This misinformation campaign is directed solely toward urbanization of the river

by development interests, which can only be served by the forced sewerage of these communities.

There has been a tremendous improvement in water quality in the lower river in the last three decades despite conversion of summer homes served by septic to year-round residences. The single most important factor has been the elimination of phosphate loading by summer discharges to the Laguna by the City of Santa Rosa as it switched over to an impressive pasture irrigation system serving, and preserving, over 6,000 acres in the Laguna basin. But the Laguna, once a passageway for salmon and steelhead into streams draining into it, will never fully recover until all direct discharges are

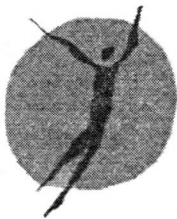
eliminated, even in the winter. This is due to a simple fact. City discharges are tied to Russian River flow in winter. The problem is that during very high river flow, the Laguna backs up and the City's phosphates settle out into the sediment. During the summer these phosphates are released back into the water and the Laguna turns into a fetid, pea-soup green morass. This disgusting sludge then contaminates a huge stretch of the lower river before natural processes clean it up around the region of Guerneville. By Monte Rio and Duncans Mills the river is virtually pristine.

The most important role served by the Laguna, however, is in moderating floods downstream in the river. In the old days the Laguna had tremendous capacity for water storage. During high river flows it backed up into the Laguna. This vital storage allowed water to rest a bit before flowing down to Guerneville and Monte Rio. But this capacity is destroyed as the Laguna fills with sediment and loses its wetlands. All of the upstream river flow now races by and eventually piles up at the narrows near Guerneville, destroying millions of dollars of property that once was free of flooding.

A full discussion of the importance of the Laguna to the Lower Russian River would take several books, but it is long past time that residents of the lower River place the blame for their plight squarely where it belongs: at the Board of Supervisors and the councils of the cities that reside in the Santa Rosa plain.

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