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A cancer in the watersheds

Nadean Bissiri Jul 21, 2016

MORE INFORMATION

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- What is the real plan for Walt Ranch?
- Finally, a move in the right direction?
- Letter understated cost of Walt Ranch
- Who is "we" on watershed initiative?

A few Tuesdays ago, I picked up the Napa Valley Register and read with a heavy heart the headlines. "County approves Walt Ranch" (June 14). I was not surprised. I feel certain that the Halls had the best environmental impact report that money could buy, with mitigation's that would make Machiavelli proud. Mr. Morrison director of planning, building and environment has assured locals that the adverse effects state in the Walt Ranch environmental impact report can be mitigated.

While the Walt Ranch environmental impact report is impressive, it is only a smokescreen for the actual damage th. will be done to the watershed.

At first glance, the Walt Ranch vineyard may not sound like a big threat to the watershed. But the ecosystem that makes up the watershed is a fragile thing. In the web of life, all things are connected. The plants, the animals, the water and the human

must stay in balance in order to maintain a healthy ecosystem

The restructuring of 500 acres is a large swath of land to dedicate to yet another vineyard development. To entertain the idea that this 500 acres would not affect both future vineyard developers and Napa's already affected ecosystem is not debatable.

If the Hall's Walt Ranch proposal is approved, it will set precedent for other vineyard developers to do the same. Every vineyard developer will want a slice of the Napa watershed pie. Remember the thousand acres of watershed already owned by the Hall family currently designated as open space? Down the line, that too can legally be sold in separate parcels; it will continue to have the potential for future development.

It is only a matter of time before the watershed will be too fragmented to function as nature intended. Our watersheds will gradually be whittled away, with a little bit here and little bit there. But the Walt Ranch is not just a little bit. Five hundred acres with more than 25,000 trees being cut down is a massive chunk of watershed.

At an April hearing, Katherine Hall made the following statement, "This is a proposal to plant a vineyard in a county zoned area for agriculture in Napa Valley and nothing more." Maybe for Mr. and Mrs. Hall it is nothing more than that -- to cut down 25,000-plus trees and irreversibly alter more than 500 acres.

But for those of us who feel strongly about the watersheds and wish to preserve them in their natural state, the watersheds are much more than just another piece of land zoned for agriculture. Raping the hillsides in the name of agriculture may be legally permissible but it is morally wrong-- a crime against nature.

Nature is fighting multiple offenses not only from man but from disease. Sudden oak death is a topic addressed recently by the Napa Valley Register. The Register quoted a UC Davis study: "Tree disease might be unstoppable. Sudden oak death has surged beyond control in California ... the state should have started fighting it back in 2002... the report is not entirely hopeless... (suggesting) fighting the disease on a small scale to slow its growth by focusing on restoring small local forests."

And what is Napa considering doing? It is considering permitting a large vineyard development in the Vaca watershed -- a development that proposes to remove many thousands of trees (e.g. the Walt Ranch.) Do people (the Halls who propose these developments in our watersheds really care about the potential environmental impact they are making?

It makes one question whether the Halls are as environmentally sensitive as a neighbor of theirs indicated.

Some people do care about preventing that impact, as was shown by the initiative to protect these lands. It is sad that the proposed initiative to protect the streams and watersheds has been halted over a technicality. Hopefully, any technical issue can be resolved before November.

Thoreau had his Walden Pond to nourish his soul; let us have our watersheds to nourish ours. We can learn much mentally physically and spiritually from our watersheds. Let them rest in peace.

With the bit-by-bit depletion of watersheds and natural habitats, Napa is losing its soul. Let's not turn it into just another glitzy tourist attraction.

Nadean Bissiri

Napa

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