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Say goodbye to our watersheds

Nadean Bissiri Mar 22, 2016

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A cancer in the watersheds

With such massive developments as the Walt Ranch and its neighbor the Circle S Ranch, several thousand acres of watershed will be harmed.

Environmental impact reports have suggested that there are mitigations for everything. But a mitigation will do exactly what it claims to do. To quote the dictionary, "mitigate...to make or become less severe." A mitigation only lessens a problem. It does not make it completely disappear.

Aside from the consequences of erosion, sedimentation, and pollution that will occur (mitigated, of course) there are other consequences that cannot be mitigated. I am speaking of the impact on the flora and fauna in the areas.

The native plants and animals that thrive there do so because

they are compatible with that environment. They would not be compatible with the vineyards that would replace their environment nor the people and activities that would be required to maintain those vineyards.

I understand that several thousand trees will be cut down, but this loss will be reduced by the planting of some new trees. New trees do not spring to maturity overnight. Tell this mitigation to the birds--the birds who have repeatedly nested in special trees year after year. Certain birds have already lost most of their habitat in the valley floor. Meadowlarks and killdeers have all but disappeared as the oak savannah has been converted to vineyards. To maintain our vineyard economy, many of these changes had to take place. But when is enough enough?

Do we have to begin to rape the hillsides to satisfy our greedy human appetites. You may not care about the plants and the birds, but you probably wouldn't enjoy having to confront a bear or mountain lion in your back yard. Sightings are increasing. These animals need thousands of contiguous acres in which to seek their prey. A vineyard here, a winery there interrupts what little hunting area is left for them.

One letter on the Opinion Page (the only pro letter I've seen in over a year) by a vineyard manager, I believe, ("In support of Walt Ranch," March 8) stated that the Walt Ranch was only a few hundred acres among several thousand plus that would be left in open space. Maybe a few hundred acres (356 acres within 507 total acres of disturbed land) doesn't sound like much to some people.

However, a few hundred here and a few hundred there, all approved by the planning commission and our board of supervisors, adds up to a non-functioning watershed. Such massive inappropriate developments like the Walt Ranch

vineyards must be stopped while there is still time. At a later date, parcels in the Walt Ranch could be sold and developed, further eroding the much touted open space and damaging the watershed.

If the Halls and their Texas associates feel compelled to spend money somewhere, let them take the philanthropic route and NOT develop the Walt Ranch. They could rename the property as the Hall Wildlife Refuge. If they wish to spend even more dollars, they could contribute toward the building of a permanent wildlife rescue and rehabilitation structure. Napa County may be the only county in the Bay Area lacking such a facility.

Nadean Bissiri

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