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Public Comment for BOS April 14 meeting Agenda Item 34. 15-0359

1 message

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Public Comment for Board of Supervisors Meeting dated April 14.pdf

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Agenda Item 34. 15-0359:

Chief Administrative Office, Parks Division, River Program, recommending the Board receive a presentation on the 2014 River Management Program Annual Report. (Est. Time: 15 Min.)

First, I would like to express my appreciation for the fine job Noah Triplett has done in updating the River Management Program Annual Report for 2014, as well as the work he did throughout 2014 with the River Management Advisory Committee.

Second, one of the issues that is not present in the 2014 Annual Report, because it first occurred in 2015, is the relocation of the RMAC meeting, which has been an unfortunate decision.

My family lives in the Lotus Coloma Valley and we own two riverfront properties here and boat the river weekly. As a member of the public, I have been regularly attending the River Management Advisory Committee (RMAC) for many years. This is no longer possible due to a decision on the part of county management to move the location of the meeting.

In opposition to every member of the RMAC committee present, the past three monthly RMAC meetings were forcibly moved from their historic location at the Lotus Fire House, which was a community center built with local funds and turned over to the county, to a location at the county offices which is remote to whitewater activity. The RMAC meetings have been held in Lotus for decades, since at least 1991, when Hilde Schweitzer became active in the RMAC. All present RMAC members voiced their opposition to this move, solely out of concern that community participation would be reduced. Indeed, at the March RMAC meeting, community participation dropped to zero.

The Lotus Coloma Valley is the recognized center of South Fork American whitewater activity which is RMAC's responsibility per Board of Supervisors RESOLUTION NO. 065-2002, dated 03/12/2002 (see https://www.edcgov.us/Government/EMD/Rivers/Resolution_065-2002.aspx) Note that this resolution also requires that any RMAC vacancies be solicited in "at least one conspicuous location in the Lotus Coloma Valley," a clear acknowledgement of the importance of the Lotus Coloma Valley community to RMAC. Substantially all whitewater trips begin or end in the Lotus Coloma Valley, as the shuttle service which is county funded can attest. The vast majority of riverfront residential properties which are significantly affected by RMAC decisions are also located in the Lotus Coloma Valley (see p. 30 for map of developed parcels on the South Fork at <http://www.edcfiresafe.org/fireplans/el-dorado-county.pdf>)

Community participation is of recognized importance. This is especially true when a plan is being updated, or in the case of the River Management Plan (RMP), completely rewritten. Notably, while the RMP is supposed to be updated every 5 years, in 2014 county management decided to hire a consultant to completely rewrite the RMP without discussing the objectives at an RMAC meeting, or obtaining the approval of the RMAC. The Resolution previously cited states that RMP updates are the responsibility of RMAC. In contrast to every other plan revision that has taken place in the county, no public comment has ever been solicited in advance of this RMP rewrite. Instead, county management made a pre-emptive decision to move the RMAC meeting location away from the community most affected by the RMP - the Lotus Coloma Valley -- in advance of presenting the rewritten RMP.

This is in marked contrast to prior RMAC practice. RMAC members spent several years holding a series of public meetings with all interested parties in order to update the River Management Plan with a proposed institutional permit section. There were very significant conflicts, which through this very inclusive process were resolved. While RMAC's work was rejected, there can be no question that the committee members fulfilled their obligation to include public comments from as many participants as possible in delivering a proposed update to the RMP.

Community participation is a voluntary effort. Many community members have other obligations to work, children or disabled family members. Making it more difficult for the community to participate in RMAC meetings directly contravenes the recommendation by the county that the RMAC adopt the use of alternative RMAC members to ensure a quorum at all meetings. Notably, there is a lack of a quorum for the upcoming May RMAC meeting.

RMAC was born out of litigation over county management of the South Fork, and exists in part to bring the many interested parties together to cooperatively resolve conflicts. In this respect it has been very successful in offering a local venue for concerned parties. Many safety and access issues have been quickly and quietly resolved through this meeting. Moving the meeting away from the site of conflict impairs this benefit significantly.

Notably, RMAC activities are funded by the River Trust Fund (RTF), not general funds. For years the financial health of the River Trust Fund has been a source of concern due to declining revenue from river user fees, the sole source of income for the RTF. Spending funds on a consultant to rewrite the plan should have been vetted at an RMAC meeting for subsequent approval by the BOS; the RMAC is responsible for advising the BOS on the use of the River Trust Fund per the BOS resolution cited above.

I, and others, would like to see the location of the meetings moved back to the Lotus Coloma Valley. Since the Lotus Fire House has been turned over to CalFire and may not be available near term, the RMAC meetings could be temporarily moved to the Pavilion at Lotus Henningsen park, where the HLP plan update meetings were held, which is a county-owned property.

Regards,

Karen Mulvany

April 13, 2015