

2009 is year to protect Siskiyou County's water

Opinion Editorial by Meadow Barr, Protect Our Waters Coalition

Recently, two large companies came up with two very different opinions about how much water there is in the McCloud Basin. Nestle claimed that their water use for a bottling plant would be a drop in a very full bucket while PG&E is seeking to enhance the water supply by adding 5-10% more water through cloud seeding.

Can we simultaneously have an endless supply of water and at the same time need to produce more of it?

The fact is that no one knows how much water is in the McCloud Basin because no one has ever conducted the appropriate studies. Make no mistake about it: water is valuable – in different ways to each of us— some for bottling, others for power generation, crops, drinking, and wildlife. Water belongs to all of us. It is held in public trust by the State of California. Why then, are the decisions that govern water so much out of the hands of the people?

Right now, big companies are positioning themselves to make long-term decisions about our water. 2009 is a watershed moment for local residents to better understand our waters, to protect our water rights and strengthen our water policy.

Protect Our Waters Coalition has a healthy agenda for 2009 including continued springs and groundwater studies of the Mount Shasta Headwaters region, participating in baseline studies for Squaw Valley Creek in the McCloud Watershed, and hosting a series of Water Talks and Siskiyou Water Network meetings.

We embarked on a multi-year research effort to characterize the springs and groundwater on Mount Shasta starting in 2006. The study is in partnership with Lisa Unkefer of AquaTerra and the UC Davis Center for Watershed Studies. The intent is to characterize flow and water chemistry of the springs and create a vulnerability index to help with decisions around these springs. See www.protectourwaters.org/science.htm.

In addition, California Trout is sponsoring four Water Talks and four Siskiyou Water Network meetings in 2009. The Water Talks topics include “An Introduction to Mount Shasta’s Unique Ecosystems” and “An Introduction to California Water Law and Policy.” To see the calendar of events please visit: www.protectourwaters.org/calendar.htm.

Water Talks are educational forums for citizens to learn from experts about water. Input from attendees at the last Siskiyou Water Network meeting showed interest in knowing more about the science and the law, hence the focus of this year’s talks.

The Siskiyou Water Network meetings are a platform for information sharing across diverse groups and interests. Again, input at the last meeting suggested that 2009 meetings be spread throughout the county so we can learn from each other. Are there common interests, problems and solutions related to the TMDL (Total Maximum Daily

Load), raising Shasta Dam, removal of Klamath Dams, cloudseeding, groundwater pumping, water quality etc.?

Meanwhile, the Protect Our Waters Coalition will continue to assess the potential impacts of a large water bottling plant on Squaw Valley Creek and the McCloud River Watershed.

In northern Siskiyou County 2009 is an important year for water issues in the Klamath, Shasta and Scott Rivers. The removal of four dams on the Klamath River comes closer to reality as a diverse group of stakeholders continue to collaborate on sustainable solutions for Klamath River fish, tribes and communities. In the Shasta and Scott Rivers endangered coho salmon numbers continue to decline as the Department of Fish and Game and other parties attempt to implement a comprehensive Incidental Take Permit program.

By tackling water issues head on, doing the necessary studies, and working together we can turn competing interests for our water from conflicts into solutions.

This New Year brings an opportunity for Siskiyou County residents to recognize how valuable water is and to put measures in place to protect our waters. It is a time to bring folks from all walks of life and perspectives together. So many dedicated people in Siskiyou County have already put their time, energy and thought into protecting our waters. We hope together as a county we can make a New Year's resolution to engage amongst our diverse communities and interests to find common ground to protect our waters.

We in Siskiyou County are blessed to have pure and clean water. Together we can work toward a future that includes water security and economic prosperity.

About the Protect Our Waters Coalition

Protect Our Waters Coalition is working to protect Mount Shasta's unique water supply by investing in science, education and policy analysis. Current members include Trout Unlimited, California Trout and the McCloud Watershed Council. Contact: info@protectourwaters.org