

County opposes ‘heritage river’ label

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Del Norte County supervisors expressed their opposition Tuesday to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife’s efforts to designate the North Fork Smith River a “heritage trout water.”

Voicing concerns about potential impacts the designation would have on private landowners, the board voted unanimously to send a letter of opposition to the CDFW.

At the heart of the issue seems to be communications between the state agency and the Del Norte County.

“They seem to keep ramrodding this stuff without letting us know what’s going on,” said District 4 Supervisor Gerry Hemmingsen. “They didn’t even send the notice to the proper address. It actually went to Eureka, not Del Norte County.

“We have no idea where some of these notices have been going. We need to bring that to their attention.”

The incorrectly addressed letter says the Heritage and Wild Trout Program was established in 1971 for waters that include lakes and streams supporting an aesthetically pleasing environment, which would be managed exclusively for wild trout.

But, said Hemmingsen, at issue is what the letter leaves out. “There’s not much specificity within the plans they have designated already that clearly establish what the requirements might be for private landowners.

“The concern is, we need to have exactly what the impacts are going to be for the community.”

District 3 Supervisor Chris Howard said he was concerned with the CDFW’s timeline. The proposal was scheduled to be on the Wednesday meeting agenda of the California Department of Fish and Game Commission.

In 2016, the Del Norte County Board of Supervisors approved designating the South Fork Smith River as heritage trout water to promote tourism, contingent upon the CDFW letting county officials know how

private-property rights would be affected by that designation.

Hemmingsen said that once the state agency outlines any impact to landowners, “I don’t know that there will be any opposition to this, if (the agency) comes to us and explains what the rules will be.”

In other action Tuesday, the supervisors authorized county staff to draft another letter, this time to Congressman Jared Huffman, seeking his support for House Resolution 5038. Howard said one of the top issues facing California agriculture is an ongoing shortage of employees.

“Without a dependable farm workforce, we all suffer from the farm-to-fork-type movements we’re trying to create here,” Howard said. “For many farm operations of all sizes, there has been no guarantee there would be enough workers to meet the needs of a community that requires the needs of a stable workforce.

“Farmers have found it next to impossible to hire domestic citizens of the U.S., even as wages increase. Workers with fraudulent documents make up half of the existing workforce.”

Howard said the Bipartisan Workforce Modernization Act - HR 5038 - would allow experienced workers to gain agricultural worker legal status, by paying a fine and ensuring they have not committed a crime while in the United States.

The bill also streamlines the H2A Agricultural Visa Program, making it more cost-effective for farmers.

“This legislation, more than any other immigrant legislation in the U.S., has significant legs,” Howard said. “There are 24 Democrats signed on and 22 Republicans, 13 of which are from California, including our old friends Doug LaMalfa (U.S. Rep. First District) and Devin Nunes (U.S. Rep. 22nd District).

“They have been stalwarts in ensuring a lot of the language that has been seen in this legislation authored by Zoe Lofgren (U.S. Rep. 19th District).”

According to www.congress.gov, HR 5038 was introduced on Nov. 12 and no vote had been taken as of Wednesday.