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Albion River Watershed Protection Association
Sierra Club, Redwood Chapter
Western Environmental Law Center

Friends of the Gualala River
Public Citizen

PRESS RELEASE

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NEW PUBLIC NOTICES REQUIRED FOR CONTROVERSIAL NORTH COAST WATER BAGGING APPLICATIONS SAYS STATE WATER BOARD

October 28, 2002 – Sacramento, CA – The State Water Resources Control Board has acknowledged that the public notices for controversial proposed water bagging operations on the Albion and Gualala Rivers in Sonoma and Mendocino Counties were inadequate and must be redone. The Board announced that it will reissue notices for the applications in the next few weeks and that a 60-day protest period will follow the date the notices are reissued. Protests already submitted remain valid and do not need to be resubmitted, said the Board.

The Board's decision came in response to a formal request from local residents and a coalition of public interest citizens' groups that noted a variety of omissions and deficiencies in the notices and applications. The most glaring omission was the applicant's, Alaska Water Exports', complete failure to even publish notices in any newspaper. In its announcement, the Board stated that when the amended notices are reissued, Alaska Water Exports will again be required to publish the notices in various local newspapers.

"These rivers and their estuaries are vital habitat for struggling remnant populations of coho salmon, steelhead trout, and tidewater goby," said Linda Perkins of the Albion River Watershed Protection Association [and the Redwood Chapter of the Sierra Club]. "The rivers' ecosystems already are substantially impaired as a result of excessive logging, and the remaining populations of these threatened fish species simply cannot take any more abuse. The water bagging proposals would suck scarce water out of the rivers and increase turbidity, both of which might push the local fish populations over the brink and into extinction," Perkins continued.

"The Gualala and Albion Rivers are in the midst of a lengthy, gradual, process of healing from years of excessive sedimentation, which would be reversed by these water bagging schemes," said Ursula Jones of Friends of the Gualala River. "The proposed water bagging operations also would severely harm the local economies that depend on tourism and recreation, because the huge diesel tugs and giant water bags would destroy the quiet natural beauty that draws visitors to the Redwood Coast for recreation," added Jones.

"The blatant failure to comply with even the most basic legal requirements for water rights applications calls into question the seriousness and good faith of Alaska Water Exports in

pursuing these water bagging proposals,” noted Simeon Herskovits, senior staff attorney with the Western Environmental Law Center, which is representing the coalition of citizens’ groups. “Citizens’ groups from the environmental community and beyond are convinced that these proposals to divert water from already impaired North Coast rivers for export to distant markets cannot be squared with the public interest of Californians or with a number of environmental laws,” Herskovits continued. “We will be scrutinizing the state and federal review of these proposals and are prepared to go to court to stop them, if necessary.”

Californians also are raising serious questions about the soundness and credibility of Alaska Water Exports, the company that is applying for these water bagging projects.

“The company behind this proposal appears to be little more than a front for the Saudi, Japanese, and Norwegian corporations listed as its backers,” said Jane Kelly of Public Citizen. “This ill-conceived plan to give away scarce water from fragile rivers for shady corporate interests to export and sell for private profit is a harbinger of the growing threat posed by corporate special interests to public ownership and control of our water resources,” added Kelly.

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