



Friends of the Gualala River

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March 25, 2005

Donna DeBaets, Supervising Ranger
Gualala Point Regional Park

PO Box 95
Gualala, CA 95445

Dear Ms DeBaets,

To our great dismay, a private group has again asked for permission to have fireworks at the county park. Friends of the Gualala River (FoGR) opposes this display (as we did two years ago) for the following reasons:

The Gualala River estuary is a lagoon during the summer months because the river mouth is closed off by a barrier beach. Anything that falls into the water will remain there until late into the fall when the first heavy, prolonged rains will cause the river to breach the barrier. Therefore, any ash residue from the fireworks will contaminate the water. Ash, being a product of combustion, contains all the elements that were burned, including heavy metals, which make the brilliant colors of fireworks, and perchlorate, which is used as a propellant. (Enclosed is a page from the State of California website about perchlorate).

These contaminants will eventually settle to the bottom of the lagoon where many invertebrates live, and where fish such as stickleback feed on them. These fish are in turn eaten by pelicans, cormorants and osprey, as well as by river otters. Later in the season, young steelhead gather and feed in the estuary to wait for the breach of the barrier.

The only access to the barrier beach is across the low, vegetated sand dunes at Gualala Point. These coastal dunes are fragile and support native vegetation that is very slow to recover from trampling or vehicle track disturbance. Some regionally rare plant species present as small populations on the Gualala Point dunes, such as Pacific wildrye (*Leymus pacificus*) could suffer significant declines from vehicle track damage. Currently, Gualala Point dunes suffer no vehicle track impacts. Vehicle use in the dunes is a highly incompatible and inappropriate use of scarce coastal dune habitats within the Sonoma County Regional Park system.

The staging process and the actual fireworks will greatly disturb the existing wildlife, both in the estuary and in the county park. River otters live in the estuary and frequently cross the sandbar to forage in the ocean. Harbor seals and California sea lions are common visitors just off-shore. Gualala Point Island is an important sea bird rookery and also home to peregrine falcons. These animals will not only be disturbed by the noise, but also by the presence of hundreds of visitors in the park and surrounding area.

Does the park even have the personnel to manage the expected crowds? Though it is not FoGR's primary concern, we are also worried about the ensuing traffic patterns along Highway 1 just south of Gualala. Parking is quite inadequate and the river bank is very steep. Inevitably, that many people concentrated in a small area will leave behind garbage that will make its way into the estuary and pollute the water.

Gualala Point Regional Park is known as a quiet oasis where people come to enjoy Nature and nothing else – let's keep it that way.

Sincerely,

Ursula Jones, president
Friends of the Gualala River

CC: Mike Reilly, Sonoma County Supervisor

CC: North Coast RWQCB, Santa Rosa