



Friends of the Gualala River

An affiliate of the Redwood Coast Watersheds Alliance

P.O. Box 1543, Gualala, CA 95445 GualalaRiver.org



PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Friends of the Gualala River receives grant to protect redwood forestland from conversion to vineyards

Annapolis, California, August 20, 2012 — Since its inception a decade ago, there has been considerable opposition to the clearcutting of a redwood forest for a future vineyard by the Spanish-owned Artesa Winery. Wending its way through the permit process, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire) gave final approval for the 154-acre clearcut earlier this year.

Friends of the Gualala River (FoGR), an affiliate of the Redwood Coast Watersheds Alliance, has opposed the project from its inception. Becoming a "party of interest" and finding legal issues, FoGR, along with Sierra Club Redwood Chapter and the Center for Biological Diversity, has sued CalFire, challenging their approval of Artesa's large forestland-to-vineyard conversion project.

The Mennen Environmental Foundation has awarded a grant of \$10,000 to support FoGR's efforts "to protect redwood forestland from vineyard conversion." The Mennen Environmental Foundation works to protect native biological diversity, including species, forests and watersheds.

Public opposition to the project is widespread and growing. In the past year, over 100,000 members of the public from California to Europe, including ~40,000 in Spain, have signed petitions opposing the project. But public opposition cannot be and is not the legal basis for the lawsuit. The intent of California's Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is to prevent or prohibit a project from despoiling the local environment. The lawsuit challenges the manner and findings made by CalFire.

In preparing the Environmental Impact Report (EIR), the agency failed to adequately consider the project's environmental impacts and did not properly analyze alternatives less damaging to the environment, in violation of CEQA. The agency only considered alternative vineyard sites that are also forested, to reach the flawed conclusion that the project would be equally damaging to the environment at other sites. Buying forested land with the intent to clearcut and destroy its forest to plant grapes is unnecessarily environmentally damaging, since there is suitable non-forested land available.



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Friends of the Gualala River is a volunteer nonprofit group that advocates for preservation of the Gualala River watershed in Sonoma and Mendocino Counties. For more information on FoGR, please visit: GualalaRiver.org

The Redwood Coast Watersheds Alliance (RCWA) is composed of affiliates along the length of the Redwood Coast. A non-profit corporation since 1989, over the years it has been the umbrella organization for Friends of the Gualala, Garcia, Big and Ten Mile Rivers, Friends of Salmon Creek, Albion River Watershed Protection Association, Greenwood Watershed Protection Association, Ocean Protection Coalition, Toxic Trespass, Environmental Commons and Coast Action Group. More information on RCWA can be found at: <http://www.rcwa.us>