



## FRIENDS OF THE EEL RIVER

*Working for the recovery of our Wild & Scenic River, its fisheries and communities.*

For Immediate Release

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# **\$SECRET \$SCHEMES\$**

## **North Coast County Supervisors Plotting Russian River Water Grab**

### ***Eel River Salmon and Steelhead To Take the Hit***

Friends of the Eel River has obtained notes using the Public Records Act that show Humboldt County Supervisor Estelle Fennell and other county supervisors have been meeting secretly for months to advance a plan environmentalists warn could lead to salmon and steelhead extinction in the Eel River.

“Supervisors Fennell, Brown, and Gore all denied having these meetings. We now know that they did in fact meet. They even went to the trouble of preparing explanations in case they got caught,” said FOER Conservation Director Scott Greacen. “And now we know why they kept their plans secret: they are trying to keep the Potter Valley Project in place, even if it leads to extinction of the Eel River’s salmon and steelhead”

Since April of 2017, Friends of the Eel River, other conservation and fishing groups, and tribes with treaty rights to Eel River salmon and steelhead, have been participating in the relicensing process for the two dams on the upper Eel River, known as the Potter Valley Project. Since last fall, we have also been meeting with stakeholders in a parallel process convened by Rep. Jared Huffman to try to develop solutions that would work for both the Eel and Russian River interests.

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Removing Scott Dam - while still retaining some capacity for winter diversions to the Russian River - would open up hundreds of miles of prime salmon and steelhead spawning grounds. And the FERC relicensing process provides a window of opportunity to forge such a deal. The key lever in securing Scott Dam removal is the requirement in the Federal Power Act that new hydropower dam licenses include fish passage where feasible. It is now clear that such passage is feasible, but would be quite expensive (\$50-90 million for a fish ladder that probably would not work very well).

These environmental and economic realities don't sit very well with either the dam owners (PG&E) or the Russian River recipients of all of the hydro plant's 'waste water.'

Last week, PG&E finally publicly announced its intent to auction the Eel River dams/Potter Valley Project off this fall. (letter attached) Also last week, FOER learned through a series of Public Records Act requests that Humboldt County Supervisor Estelle Fennell and her fellow Eel Russian River Commissioners (including county supervisors James Gore of Sonoma and Carre Brown of Mendocino) held a series of at least five secret meetings with PG&E and various Russian River interests over the last year to put together a plan to keep the Eel River dams in place.

This scheme would move the dams out of federal licensing so as to avoid having to provide additional protection for fisheries, especially fish passage. Under what's called a "non power license," they'd operate the project primarily as a water transfer project, but they'd keep the hydropower running as well. They think they'd even get state Renewable Power credit for running fish-killing dams!

Supervisor Fennell is asking the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors to move tomorrow to appoint her and Supervisor Bohn to an ad hoc committee that would continue meeting in secret to push this secret plan to avoid protecting Eel River salmon and steelhead. (Agenda item attached) Nowhere does Supervisor Fennell explain the non power license plan she is clearly seeking to advance. That idea has never been presented to the public and stakeholders in any forum by its proponents.

"It is outrageous that our public representatives have been meeting in secret to undermine the public process seeking a reasonable compromise that

would protect Eel River fish and Russian River water interests,” Friends of the Eel River Executive Director Stephanie Tidwell said. “We find it particularly galling that Supervisor Fennell is willing to negotiate the Eel River future's away, knowing full well her constituency would oppose her if they knew what she was up to.”

As a policy minimum, Humboldt County should be pushing for a solution that would remove Scott Dam and restore fish access to the Eel River headwaters. But at the most fundamental level, we deserve the opportunity to discuss and debate the positions our elected representatives are taking on our behalf. Democracy cannot function when leaders make policy in secret.

**The meeting begins at 9am at the usual location in the Supervisors Chambers in the Humboldt County Courthouse. Appointing Supervisors Fennell and Bohn to continue the secret negotiations is on the agenda.**

Attached are copies of handwritten meeting notes FOER obtained through Public Records Act request from the Sonoma County Water Agency and FOER’s transcripts of those notes. We have added some exposition (denoted in blue) to explain details.

These notes show that ERRC commissioners have been actively engaged in putting together this plan since July of last year. This reality flies in the face of the assurances that FOER and others received from ERRC commissioners denying such meetings ever happened.

It is worth noting that in response to our PRA requests, none of the four counties was able to find any evidence that any of these meetings or any of this correspondence ever took place. It’s very clear that their elected officials were actively engaged in these discussions. We look forward to the counties’ explanations of their inability to comply with the Public Records Act.

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