

## Mill Creek siphon

By ANDREA WAGNER -DN Staff Writer Red Bluff Daily News

Updated:

RedBluffDailyNews.com

An urban building project in Napa County could pull water from Mill Creek in Tehama County, if the developer's plan is approved.

Some locals are trying to stop it from happening.

The remote 65-mile stretch of Mill Creek, from Lassen Peak to Los Molinos, has remained relatively undeveloped and is home to many native species of animals, including the chinook salmon.

Although Mill Creek is more than 150 miles from the proposed project area south of Napa, some of its water could be used there.

The Orange Cove Irrigation District, a public water management agency formed in 1937 that serves nearly 30,000 acres of eastern San Joaquin Valley's Citrus Belt, bought surface water rights from some private farms along Mill Creek about 10 years ago.

Mill Creek is a Sacramento River tributary with just two areas where water is diverted for agricultural uses.

The Los Molinos Mutual Water Company helps manage the 134- square mile watershed that is almost entirely within Tehama County.

Much of the watershed is privately owned.

With its allotted water rights on Mill Creek, the Orange Cove district has offered to sell water to the Napa Pipe project developers, said Burt Bundy, a board member of the Los Molinos Mutual Water Company and president of the Mill Creek Conservancy.

The Napa project, proposed just before the economic downturn, has been in development since 2007.

Developers want to build a new neighborhood of 2,050 dwelling units, including a 150-unit retirement home and care facility, a 150-room hotel and multiple acres of parks and retail space within a 154-acre site three miles south of downtown Napa.

With that increase in land use comes an increased use of water.

After release of the final Environmental Impact Report in February, some opponents wrote letters to the project leaders to ask them to reconsider the use of Mill Creek surface water because the report didn't look at all the environmental impacts of taking water from the creek, Bundy said.

When Napa County planning officials hosted a public hearing Feb. 21, Bundy was there. His letter was read, but the officials didn't allow for open comment, he said.

Participants could only submit questions in writing during the meeting.

However, the planning officials are starting to recognize that Mill Creek is not a good option, Bundy said.

Revisions in the Environmental Impact Report did speak to some of their concerns, he said.

They have responded, but we don't think they're accurate, he said.

Mill Creek is one of the few streams left that hold the native spring run chinook salmon, Bundy said. The report didn't address the impacts of less water on the fish.

Neither did the report address the shareholders of the Los Molinos Mutual Water Company, who could lose out in the arrangement, Bundy said.

This ill-conceived scheme to take water from its origin where it is needed for both agricultural production and endangered species is wrong, Bundy wrote to the Napa officials.

It brings to mind the rape of the Owens Valley by the City of Los Angeles nearly a century ago. Resource coordinator for the Mill Creek Conservancy, Kerry Burke, who lives in the town of Mill Creek on a family ranch, used to be a Tehama County planning commissioner.

She submitted a detailed response to the Environmental Impact Report.

The folly of this proposal is too much to fathom given the fact that OCID purchased a Mill Creek water right for conservation purposes now only to sell a portion of the water right for this intense urban development in Napa County that is over 150 miles from the water source in Mill Creek, Burke wrote.

She added there has been no outreach to stakeholders in Tehama County and planners have omitted addressing significant Endangered Species Act and CEQA issues.

A week after the Environmental Impact Report was released, Napa County planning officials released a supplemental report that offered two alternatives to the project that take out the use of Mill Creek and greatly minimize the proposal.

The staff recommendation issued Feb. 10 suggests the Napa County board approve a much smaller project that would incorporate just 63 acres at the proposed site, creating 700 dwelling units.

In the alternative plan, water would come through negotiation with the city of Napa or area groundwater.

Staff is recommending the same change to (Napa County policy) and understands that obtaining surface water from Mill Creek would not be feasible with a smaller project, the document states.

A second public hearing on the Napa Pipe Project is scheduled for 6 p.m., March 19, at the Little Theatre, Building 1200, Napa Valley College, 2777 Napa-Vallejo Highway in Napa.

The hearing is open to the public and is intended to allow public comment in response to the final Environmental Impact Report for the project.

Water concerns are not new, but Bundy worries that other developers could see Napa County buying water rights on Mill Creek as an opportunity and others could try to do the same, he said.

Although many want to see the water stay in the creek and are working hard to keep it there, others are looking to divert it to more populated areas, he said.

They're going to do it one way or another, Bundy said.

For more information on the Napa Pipe project, go to [www.countyofnapa.org/napapipe](http://www.countyofnapa.org/napapipe)

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The Mill Creek Conservancy is at [www.millcreekconservancy.com](http://www.millcreekconservancy.com)

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## **Richard Mazzucchi - Positive Point: Another Mill Creek massacre**

*Richard Mazzucchi Red Bluff Daily News*  
*Updated:*

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Mill Creek begins its journey to the Sacramento River high on the slopes of Lassen Peak, a dormant 10,500-foot volcano in Lassen National Park.

Mill Creek's watershed encompasses an area of approximately 134 square miles, almost entirely within Tehama County, at elevations ranging from over 8,000 feet on Lassen Peak to 200 feet on the Sacramento Valley floor. The first several miles of Mill Creek's 65-mile length pass through pine-forested Lassen National Park before descending into the remote, steep-sided volcanic canyon that guides it to its final miles across the valley to where it finally empties into the Sacramento River near the small town of Los Molinos.

With the exception of the hamlet of Mill Creek at 4,700 feet and houses near its mouth in Los Molinos, Mill Creek passes through a wild, unpopulated and pristine landscape. The undisturbed, natural state of Mill Creek's watershed provides habitat for a number of rare and endangered species, from peregrine falcons and Sierra red foxes to spring run Chinook salmon and steelhead. Much of Mill Creek's watershed is privately owned, with public access restricted to the areas within Lassen National Forest and Lassen National Park including the Ishi Wilderness Area. Water is extracted at two areas by the Tehama Colusa Irrigation District.

Trails lead both upstream and downstream into the Ishi Wilderness area to the site of the first Mill Creek massacre, where the Yahi tribe was decimated by local ranchers, leaving Ishi to become known as "the last wild Indian" when he surfaced outside Oroville in 1911.

Fast forward 101 years and we find a second massacre on Mill Creek afoot as urban building project developers in Napa County plan to take water from Mill Creek to meet its water requirements although they are more than 150 miles away. Let me explain. The Napa project has been in development since 2007.

Developers want to build a new neighborhood of 2,050 dwelling units, including a 150-unit retirement home and care facility, a 150-room hotel and multiple acres of parks and retail space within a 154-acre site three miles south of downtown Napa. In order to proceed they must receive approval from Napa County planning officials, to include provision for the water needs of their development.

The Orange Cove Irrigation District, a public water management agency formed in 1937 that serves nearly 30,000 acres of eastern San Joaquin Valley's Citrus Belt, bought surface water rights from some private farms along Mill Creek about 10 years ago.

Since Mill Creek is a Sacramento River tributary those water rights can move via the Sacramento River to be withdrawn and sent via a pipeline to water lawns in Napa if the plan is approved.

With its allotted water rights on Mill Creek, the Orange Cove district has offered to sell water to the Napa Pipe project developers and then to the housing development.

After the required Environmental Impact Report was released in February, some opponents to the plan wrote letters to the project leaders beseeching them to reconsider the use of Mill Creek surface water because the report didn't look at all the environmental impacts of taking water from the creek.

As reported in the Red Bluff Daily News last week, Burt Bundy, a board member of the Los Molinos Mutual Water Company and president of the Mill Creek Conservancy submitted a compelling letter and attended a Feb. 21 public meeting of Napa County officials addressing this matter.

Thanks to his efforts, among others, the Napa planning officials are starting to recognize that Mill Creek is not a good option. Although revisions in the Environmental Impact Report did speak to some of the concerns they aren't accurate according to Burt.

While Mill Creek is one of the few streams left that hold the native spring-run chinook salmon the report didn't even address the impacts of less water on the fish.

Neither did the report address the shareholders of the Los Molinos Mutual Water Company, who could lose out in the arrangement, much less the owners of properties adjacent to the creek.

It seems reasonable that the sale of water rights should be restricted to counties of origin and should be limited to conservation or agricultural applications.

If the people of Napa, or Orange County for that matter need more water for their developments, have them desalinate and use abundant nearby ocean water.

A second public hearing on the Napa Pipe Project is scheduled for 6 p.m., March 19, at the Little Theatre, Building 1200, Napa Valley College, 2777 Napa-Vallejo Highway in Napa - I entreat you to voice your concerns to help prevent another Mill Creek massacre.

I acknowledge the work of Daily News reporter Andrea Wagner and the website [www.millcreekconservancy.com](http://www.millcreekconservancy.com)

in the preparation of this week's column.

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Richard Mazzucchi is a retired research engineer specializing in energy efficiency and renewable energy. He has travelled extensively and now makes his home in Los Molinos, where he is striving to manifest a sustainable and spiritual lifestyle and operate a barbecue equipment and supply business. He can be reached at [living-green@att.net](mailto:living-green@att.net).

**Linton Brown: Mill Creek**

*Special to the Daily News Red Bluff Daily News*  
*Updated:*

RedBluffDailyNews.com

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Editor:

In his March 6 column, "Another Mill Creek massacre," Richard Mazzucchi crafts an overwrought emotional image of impending doom. He describes a proposed water right transfer to a Napa County development, likening it to the long-ago massacre of the Yahi tribe.

The "second massacre" is a clever hook. But it is bogus - more like rabble-rousing than a proper product of a research engineer.

There are strong reasons to oppose the Napa proposal, but they concern legal precedents and impacts on downstream users, not that Mill Creek would be dried up. Under the proposed transfer, diversions from Mill Creek would be reduced, resulting in greater flow in lower Mill Creek. That additional water would remain in the Sacramento River, to be pumped from the northwestern Delta to Napa County via the existing North Bay Aqueduct (a State Water Project facility).

So, depending upon the time of year and the weather, the proposed transfer would cause something between zero and a small increase in Mill Creek flow. The Napers would not tunnel under Mill Creek and suck it dry.

Mr. Mazzucchi ends with this helpful suggestion: "If the people of Napa, or Orange County for that matter, need more water for their developments, have them desalinate" Back in the day, that attitude was called FUJIGM. The last part of that acronym was "Jack, I got mine."

Linton Brown, Red Bluff

**H.A. "Gus" Collin III: More Mill Creek***Special to the Daily News Red Bluff Daily News**Updated:*RedBluffDailyNews.com

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Editor:

I am writing in response to two recent articles in your publication regarding a potential assignment of water rights from Orange Cove Irrigation District to a planned development in Napa County.

OCID purchased two water rights on Mill Creek in Tehama County in 1999 as part of a program to enhance instream flows for the benefit of salmon and steelhead fisheries. After strong initial support from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation the program was never permitted, so OCID began evaluating options that would continue to allow the water rights to benefit critical habitat and the environment in lower Mill Creek.

After discussion with several potential partners, the OCID Board of Directors determined that assignment of a portion of the water rights to the Napa Pipe Project was consistent with the intended use of those rights. That project will allow the water rights to enhance instream flows in lower Mill Creek for environmental purposes on a year-round basis, while also being put to use for a LEED-certified redevelopment project in Napa County. Contrary to statements in your newspaper, the program would result in more water being available for fish, not less.

While your paper characterizes opposition by the Los Molinos Mutual Water Company and other local landowners as being concerned with environmental protection, your readers should be aware that those parties actually seek to block the proposed project, so that they can divert more water from Mill Creek for their own private benefit, leaving less in the stream for fish.

H.A. "Gus" Collin III, Orange Cove Gus Collin is vice president of the board of directors of Orange Cove Irrigation District.