



# Enforcement News

## **Vineyard developers face \$3.75 million fine for harming streams, wetlands in Sonoma County**

*Investigation dates to the 2018 clearing of oak trees that impacted Russian River watershed*

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**SANTA ROSA** – Sonoma County vineyard developers accused of causing significant damage to streams and wetlands from the clearing of 40 acres of oak woodlands at the former Alexander Valley Ranch in 2018 are facing a \$3,750,852 fine from the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board.

According to the complaint brought by the North Coast Water Board’s enforcement staff, the developers, Hugh Reimers and Krasilsa Pacific Farms LLC, failed to fulfill the terms of a 2019 Cleanup and Abatement Order, which required them to restore the streams and wetlands to their previous condition to address the environmental harm that their actions caused.

The case stems from the actions of the developers on the 2,278-acre property three miles east of Cloverdale in northern Sonoma County. In addition to the damage caused to headwater streams and wetlands, a board investigation also found that the accused parties discharged fine sediment to tributaries of the Little and Big Sulphur creeks in the Russian River watershed, which already has elevated levels of sediment causing it to be listed as impaired under the Clean Water Act.

Impacts on the property from activities four years ago continue to threaten the migration, spawning, reproduction and early development of cold-water fish. Excess sediment delivery to streams can smother aquatic animals and habitats; alter or obstruct flows resulting in flooding; and reduce water clarity, making it difficult for organisms to breathe, find food and refuge, and reproduce.

“The actions of the dischargers caused the destruction and degradation of state waters in violation of California law,” said Joshua Curtis, North Coast Water Board assistant executive officer. “Their resistance to restoring those waters caused a loss of natural resources that would otherwise benefit the public, and the proposed fine shows there is a cost for failing to comply with regulations that protect the environment.”



On August 29, 2019, the board issued a Cleanup and Abatement Order directing the dischargers to submit a workplan to assess, restore and mitigate for the impacts on their property by April 15, 2020, and to implement an approved plan by Oct. 15, 2020. To date, the dischargers have not submitted an acceptable workplan. One of the board's priorities is to hold accused parties accountable for missed deadlines on existing enforcement orders.

A public hearing before the board will likely be scheduled during the first week of August 2022 to consider the complaint and vote on whether to approve the fine.

The administrative complaint is [available for review](#) on the North Coast Water Board's website.



*Looking south toward a wetland that was destroyed in 2018. Prior to the impacts, trees lined the pool and a spring area in the background and unique vegetation was able to grow in the saturated ground. The dischargers removed the trees and pulled steel claws over the ground with a bulldozer, dug a trench and buried perforated pipe to drain the water out of the wetland.*

*The North Coast Water Board's mission is to develop and enforce water quality objectives and implement plans that will best protect the region's waters while recognizing our local differences in climate, topography, geology and hydrology.*