

Sorax, The Ghost of Coho Salmon Past, Addresses The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors

By Brock Dolman

I am a ghost of coho salmon past, once born and raised in Dutch Bill Creek, below Occidental. My last reported sighting there was in the 1960's. I speak for all salmon and wildlife species not able to attend your meetings. Do you realize that as public servants and supposed stewards of the Russian River that it is the only river in California to have three listed Salmonid species: Coho, Chinook and Steelhead? That is three distinct species of unique, ancient animals. Shall I remind you that humans, all 6 billion of you, compromise only one distinct species, which at this point ought to be renamed "Homo consumous."

We as salmon, as recently in our evolution as 150 years ago, used to live in peace with the humans of this land, and we co-evolved with the harbor seals and sea lions and our natal forested creeks. The abundance of our families was so great that your early pioneering families remarked "that we were so numerous" they could "walk on our backs." This all changed with your arrival. In the last 100 years, or during the time of those 3rd, 4th & 5th generation families who so proudly and loudly exclaim in your newspapers to be stewards of the land, it was they who cleared this land of over 95% of its old growth forests, 95% of its riparian forests, drained 95% of its wetlands. I ask you where are my friends the Grizzly, the elk, the antelope, the marbled Murrelet? My coho ancestors used to number 500,000 in California rivers and now our runs number less than 5,000, to as low as 1,000 individuals! We are nearing the brink of functional extinction simultaneously with such gloating of stewardship.

It is critical for all of you to recognize that, compared to the past, this land is actually in a highly degraded state. You all need to own up to the fact that your ancestors are indisputably responsible for the overwhelming genocide of the Pomo and Miwok peoples, the silvacide of the great forests, the soilacide (as your activities have eroded and compacted the once rich fertility) and the salmonicide (as I stand before you at the tail end of our existence). If you have the vision and courage, this can change, you can turn this around if you act in earnest now.

This erosion ordinance you pass today with its especially inadequate riparian setbacks is a feeble first step and leaves me with fear for my children, but a critical move in the right direction if you decide to take more steps and begin walking towards a future vision of ecological watershed integrity. Remember, I am a fish of the forest. Without trees, my breeding streams fill with sediment, dry up due to lack of groundwater recharge and what water remains becomes lethally hot for my young. Every aspect of

your development paradigm must be questioned and reevaluated with restorative criteria. You must question your roads, parking lots, housing, industrial, agricultural, logging and mining practices. We the salmon are dying from the cumulative impacts of your collective inabilities to think like a watershed. If we go extinct and fade from memory, so will you!

In closing, since my spawning gravel's are so embedded with silt from the denuded, compacted hillsides, I want to offer each of you, as servants of the public trust, an egg of mine that hopefully will help your thoughts to incubate on taking the recovery of Totem Salmon seriously and birthing a new vision of a shared watershed commons for the sake of all our relations.

Thank you.