

# Friends of Mark West Watershed

Statement Regarding Proposed Cornell Winery, UPE03-0092, 420 Wappo Road, Upper Mark West Watershed, Santa Rosa, APN 028-260-047

February 10, 2005

My name is Richard Baril. I live at 7889 St. Helena Road. I am here on behalf of the Friends of Mark West Watershed. We are a watershed community dedicated to protecting, preserving and restoring the Mark West Creek and its watershed as a natural and community resource.

Mark West Creek is a key tributary to the Russian River because it runs year around and because, despite the extensive historic alteration of its watershed, rare and endangered steelhead and Coho salmon still successfully spawn there, although in greatly reduced, and continuing declining numbers.

We are concerned about any activity in our watershed that threatens the ability of Mark West Creek to continue to recover its natural ecological functions including its support of steelhead and salmon. The two greatest threats posed by the proposed winery (and its associated vineyard) are first, accelerated erosion resulting in sediment build up in the creek and second, the diminution of the flow of Mark West Creek, particularly at the end of the summer when flows naturally decline and winery and vineyard water usage are at their peak. The proposal also raises concerns about the elimination and fragmentation of wildlife habitat and the project's impacts on traffic safety on both the one lane, gravel, privately-maintained Wappo Road, and the narrow winding St. Helena Road, particularly during construction but, depending on its ultimate scale, during its operation as well.

We have met as a community to consider the pros and cons of this winery proposal. As you can see from the attachment to our statement, we have tried to take a positive view of the matter, even to the point of considering what characteristics would make a winery "watershed friendly." Guy Davis, the proposed winery's operating partner, provided a tour of the site and met with our group to explain the proposed project and to answer questions. We are very grateful for Guy's forthrightness and openness and willingness to hear and understand the community's concerns. And we appreciate his commitment to employee sustainable wine growing practices and state-of-the-art erosion controls and water quality protections. In fact, Guy has made it clear that he shares the Friends of Mark West Watershed's objectives to preserve and restore the creek and has agreed to work with the group in developing a final set of "watershed friendly winery" criteria that we might urge on all of the wineries in our watershed.

Many of our members believe that the only "watershed friendly" winery in the upper Mark West Watershed is **no** winery at all. They urge our group to vigorously oppose the winery. However, we also recognize that the County, in its General Plan, has policies

supporting the location of agricultural processing facilities, which normally would be classified as industrial land uses, in rural and agricultural areas as needed to support agriculture by allowing the onsite processing of locally produced crops. We understand that this policy is intended to preserve open space and the rural ambiance and quality of life so important to Sonoma County and its residents. However, we believe that these policies need to be applied with care to assure that they achieve their intent.

We strongly believe that the planned Cornell Winery exceeds the intent of these policies by proposing a facility that will have more than **300%** of the capacity necessary to process even the most optimistic yield from the 25 acres of grapes grown on the winery property. The project proponents have told the community that it is not their intention to cut additional oak woodlands and Douglas fir forests and to convert them to yet more vineyards. We have been told that their intent is simply to produce wine from their vineyards on site rather than subjecting their neighbors to the traffic associated with trucking their grapes offsite for processing. Yet approval of a 20,000 case facility at this location and the importation of sufficient additional grapes to feed it, would result in twice the truck traffic associated with hauling the property's grapes off site for processing. The processing of grapes grown elsewhere and trucked to this site is an industrial processing activity that should be conducted in an urban area.

Although the Friends of Mark West Watershed did not reach a consensus to oppose the approval of this winery, we do unanimously agree that, should the commission decide to approve this application, production from the facility should be limited to an absolute maximum of 10,000 cases per year.

We understand that some of our other concerns are difficult to address in the context of an individual project consideration and we look forward to working with the County and the other regulatory authorities to find opportunities to deal with them. In particular we hope to implement a system for measuring and monitoring water usage and stream flows in our watershed. Creek side residents uniformly report that the water flow in Mark West Creek, particularly in the late summer, has consistently declined over the last thirty or more years. However, without adequate monitoring data it is impossible to determine with certainty the extent or cause of this decline. We request that you also consider a permit condition that would require the winery proponents to participate in future County approved hydrology measuring, monitoring and managing efforts if and when they are established.

Regarding construction traffic, the project proponents have agreed to not use truck and trailer transfer rigs (so called doubles) particularly for the removal of somewhere between 800 and 1000 truckloads of spoils resulting from the excavation of over 10,000 square feet of underground caves.

In summary, the Friends of Mark West Watershed bottom line is, although many of our members would prefer that you turn down this application, we will **not** oppose the approval of this application if:

1. The winery production capacity is limited to a maximum of 10,000 cases per year.
2. The winery will agree to participate in future county approved hydrological monitoring in the watershed and will consider use of all practical water conservation measures.
3. The winery will manage its traffic to minimize associated traffic safety hazards including eliminating the use of “doubles” and providing advanced notice to neighbors of periods of elevated haul traffic.

We believe that these requests are entirely reasonable and consistent with the County’s plans and policies and strongly urge that, should you chose to approve this permit, you include these proposed conditions.

Thanks you very much for hearing and considering our point of view on this application.

I’d be glad to answer any questions.