



1325 Imola Ave. West PMB-614
Napa, Ca. 94558
707-255-7434 Fax. 259-1097
www.edennapa.org

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The Napa County Planning Commission recently approved a winery project on Bennett Lane in Calistoga called the Bennett Lane Winery expansion.

A neighbor objected to the Napa County Planning Commission's approval of the project because under the California Environmental Quality Act, CEQA, the project would have a significant cumulative impact on groundwater.

Expert hydrologist, Dennis Jackson submitted substantive comments objecting to the Bennett Winery based on his findings that the groundwater basin is in depletion and that there is insufficient groundwater available to supply the expansion of the Bennett Lane Winery.

Jackson cited three previous hydrological Technical Memos by Faye (USGS 1973) and West Yost and Associates which said groundwater levels will decline if pumpage exceeds 24,000 acre foot per year and would dry up parts of the Napa River in drought years. West Yost and Associates reported that in 2005 the extraction rate was already 24,856 acre feet per year.

An appeal of the Napa County Planning Commission's decision to the Napa County Board of Supervisors occurred on March 17, 2007. All five of the Board of Supervisors ignored hydrologist Dennis Jackson's warnings that Napa County's Groundwater Ordinance which allows extractions of up to 1.0 acre feet per year per acre of land surface is depleting groundwater resources in dry years.

At the following meeting of the Board of Supervisors on March 24, John Stephens, Living Rivers Advisory Chair, said the significance of the Jackson's report had been over looked. Given the expert testimony in the Bennett Lane Winery appeal he urged the County to reconsider their allowable extraction rate of the Napa Valley Water Basin. The Board referred the matter to the Napa County Public Works Department for review.

Contact: John Stephens, Living River's Advisory Chair, 251-0106