

**Friends of the Van Duzen
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Comments on the Biological Resources Element of the General Plan:

Friends of the Van Duzen River, in cooperation with the Humboldt Watershed Council, Friends of the Eel, and Salmon Forever, supports those policies for the general plan that protect water quality as well as critical and sensitive habitat for salmonids and all biological life. We advocate for sustainable timber harvesting practices with improved streamside management. Ultimately the goal is the return of a viable fisheries industry as a key base for our economic and general plan in this unique region.

From 2006-2009, the Van Duzen Watershed Project monitored water quality in the Van Duzen River Basin at 10 monitoring sites, studying road conditions, riparian zones, geology, timber harvest history, and other elements affecting water quality and fisheries within the Basin.

One key historic factor affecting biological resources was the dramatic reduction in the size of riparian protection zones by the Pacific Lumber Company Watershed Analysis and Habitat Conservation Plan. Upon the sale of the Headwaters forest in 1999, riparian buffer zones of 250 feet were originally established as "green zones" for protection of species pending further investigation. Although Friends of the Van Duzen challenged PALCO's scientific data, in 2002 riparian stream buffer zones were reduced to 150 feet for the wild and scenic Eel and Van Duzen Rivers, with a minimal 50 feet stream buffer zone for all the tributaries.

This change in riparian policy contributed significantly to the increase in sedimentation and the further decline of the native salmon population. Combined with clear cutting and tractor yarding, 5000 acres of timber were approved for harvest by the California Department of Forestry over the next decade. (22% of Pacific Lumber Company's holdings in the Van Duzen). The Van Duzen became known as the "Sacrifice Zone". These policies created a myriad of problems in an already impaired watershed. Erosion and fine sediment caused by over-harvesting and development are among the greatest threats to biological resources. Increased stream turbidity prevents salmonid from finding food while settling sediment destroys properly functioning conditions for critical habitat. **With Coho close to extinction in the Van Duzen and Chinook seriously endangered, the General Plan should include additional protection for these critical indicator species by protecting and improving critical and sensitive habitat, enacting land use policies for preservation of forests and open space, and improving streamside management as a strategic way to protect biological resources.**

For the past two years we have seen, and we have rejoiced at the increase in salmon in the Eel River and the Van Duzen particularly in the Yager Basin. Let's remember the prior 25 years. Enclosed you will find that data from the California Department of Fish and Game showing the serious decline in salmon population in the Van Duzen River Basin. Can you make a difference? Can you help to restore a once vibrant fisheries population in all the rivers in Humboldt. Yes, you can! You can through the General Plan. You can help provide protection for biological life!

In 1965, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service estimated the Van Duzen native salmon population at close to 5000 Coho and Chinook salmon. From 1984-2008 we were under 500! Remember that the Van Duzen River is the most erosive of its size in the U.S., and the Eel River is the 2nd most erosive river in the world next to the Yangtze River in China. Do what you can do! Let's restore this valuable resource. Thank you!

Van Duzen River Tributary Spawning Surveys California Department of Fish and Game

