

This is Erin Dunn from the Fortuna Chamber of Commerce with a Community Comment.

A few weeks ago, Scott Bauer and Scott Downie from California Fish and Wildlife spoke to the Fortuna Chamber of Commerce. Bauer showed slides of the environmental degradation that is happening in our County due to large illegal marijuana grows.

Our streams, our wildlife and our soil are being poisoned by large operation growers who follow no guidelines, are not accountable to government regulations and evidently have no social conscience.

Last week the New York Times put a spotlight on the issue with their article about the horrendous environmental damage being done by these illegal and highly sophisticated grows.

My cry to anyone who'll listen has been "where is EPIC NOW? Where is Baykeeper NOW? If this was a Timber company they would be protesting and have a law suit already before the State Courts." I was tired of hearing the so-called environmental groups say that the grows were on what had been clear cuts so somehow it was STILL the timber companies fault.

Then I thought if I was going to say something like that, I better be sure that I had my facts straight.

So I emailed EPIC and Baykeeper. I was straight up saying that while their groups had the RHETORIC down about the issue—holding symposia and panel discussions--it didn't appear like they were actually DOING anything. That to people from an area like Fortuna who were negatively impacted by the loss of timber and mill jobs, it FEELS like the environmental groups who protested the timber companies were ignoring the pot growers because there's no money to be gained from it.

Then it dawned on me. I'm not out protesting either. I'm pointing fingers and discussing the issue but not acting on it.

So I asked Gary Graham Hughes from EPIC—how do you put a protest group together? How do people like me, who are not mainstream protesters, get out and do something about it. Is it a safety issue right now? Is there even a way to win this one?

His response back didn't address my protest questions but he DID offer to come speak to the Chamber. I'm not sure if our group is ready for that or not. I'll have to ask.

I DO know that bringing about change in the practices of illegal growers is way beyond writing a letter to the editor or even using a community comment.

I'm not even sure WHO can do anything. Law enforcement is trying. Fish & Wildlife is trying. There's some talk about trying to ban rat poison in the stores and the environmentalists have created a best practices manual. So far success has been minimal.

So, to anyone out there who is planning a protest on illegal pot growing lands, call me at the Chamber. I'll join you. Teach me how to bring about change through activism. Because right now I'm tired of my own rhetoric and finger pointing. I want to DO something about it.

This has been Erin Dunn with a Community Comment.