

I'm Rod Allen substituting for Erin Dunn of the Fortuna Chamber of Commerce with a community comment. As chairman of the chamber's board of directors, I'm thankful to Lisa Losey for filling in at the chamber office while Erin is out of town.

You may remember Erin's comment about the visit we received from EPIC (the Environmental Protection Information Center) back in August. We were wondering what EPIC is doing to protect the environment from greedy large-scale marijuana growers and the meeting became somewhat contentious after the fellow from EPIC indicated that timber is still a bigger threat to the environment than pot growing. We obviously had some disagreement there. But more recently we had a presentation from an organization which is on the ground actually DOING something about the damage caused by the grows. This is not an environmental group or a nonprofit organization of any kind. Pacific Watershed Associates is a real business... a team of working scientists and technicians which handles among other things, erosion and sediment control and restoration and stabilization of damaged property. Geologist Kathy Moley presented an impressive summary of work they have done on location of some former major marijuana growing operations. They come to properties that have un-permitted and often egregious sediment manipulations, grading and streambed degradation. In other words the growers have wrecked the property. PWA's work includes cleaning up, recontouring with heavy equipment, seeding and mulching of ridge tops that have been carelessly graded, stripped and polluted by the growers. Because marijuana growing itself is unlawful, we can never expect the growers to use lawful practices. We won't see them apply for permits to clear the land, divert the streams, use poisons, dump waste and generally trash the property they use. Like it or not, legalization is the only path toward environmental regulation of our county's biggest industry... toward getting a handle on the damage being done. Meanwhile, hats off to PWA - Pacific Watershed Associates of McKinleyville for being part of the solution. And now for a couple of shameless plugs. Please join us Thursday morning January 16th 7:30 at River Lodge for Fortuna's annual State of the City Breakfast. Also BE THERE at River Lodge for our 2nd annual "taste of" fund raising event, Fortuna's Favorites, Thursday evening January 30th, 5:30 to 7:30. Get details on both at fortuna-chamber.com. I'm Rod Allen for Erin Dunn with a community comment on KINS.