

May 13, 2014

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

I attended the morning session of the North Coast Water Quality Control Board meeting at River Lodge in Fortuna last week. I was in for a couple of surprises.

First, I was surprised to hear that they are just now putting in controls to abate damage to our water by illegal Marijuana grows. They hoped to have rules in place by the end of this year. Wait a minute, this isn't already in place? The worst pollution and water diversion industry in Humboldt County and they won't have anything in place until the end of the year?

The second surprise, in a way, was that the board was made up of all middle aged white guys and staff were just under middle aged white guys. There were two women off to the side recording the meeting, but they were never introduced. And the representative from the State Water Board--also a middle aged white guy. In this day and age, even in somewhat homogenous Humboldt County, it still looked weird and not right.

My third surprise was that the chairman of the board gave a shout out of praise to someone running for office, and the kudos seemed out of place since the person doesn't have an official role with water policies at this time. On second thought, it was entirely inappropriate. Not that anyone in the audience was going to vote for this guy—but still.

For the record, I worked at Pacific Lumber Company when we had many a run-in with the Water Quality Control Board. Some of it about legitimate concerns, some about manufactured concerns. I haven't had a high regard for that group since that time.

I heard this great thing on NPR yesterday morning. They were talking about Eureka Springs (Arkansas I think) and how the existing far right Christians are living with a burgeoning gay community. Evidently there is a huge cross in town representing the Christian religion that would seem to put the two groups within the community at odds. The guy being interviewed was with the gay community. He said he didn't resent the cross because it was part of the mosaic that made Eureka Springs wonderful. And he welcomed it just like he welcomes the rainbow flags.

It gave me pause. I immediately began to think of my own town of Fortuna. I thought if I'm ever asked about something perceived as quirky and polarizing in Fortuna, I'm going to say it's part of our mosaic.

Humboldt County could take a page from that playbook—we could begin to think of ourselves as a mosaic--and not individual areas with competing ideologies. Our unique geographic identities are not a bad thing. Is it possible that we could begin to embrace our differences? It harkens back to the old “live and let live” motto that we have seemingly grown away from.

As I think more about that particular outlook, it becomes clear to me why I had that adverse reaction to the Water Quality Control Board—they were not a mosaic.

This is Erin Dunn with a community comment.