

GREEN RUSH COMMUNITY COMMENT: July 16, 2015 Mike Goldsby

I went swimming in the Eel River at Myers Flat this week. The water level is very low and the river is slow. The moss is thick and people predict an early bloom of blue-green algae. It won't be swimmable for much longer. And the smell of growing marijuana drifts across the Flat in a strong breeze. In the middle of a drought, marijuana cultivation goes full steam ahead.

The Yurok Tribal police recently joined National, State and local Law Enforcement to serve a series of search warrants on tribal lands. They seized over 10,000 plants in several large marijuana plantations.

We are accustomed to the usual press release following a large bust, but the Yurok Tribe minced no words in their media release. They said "The industrial-scale grows resemble mountain-top coal mining more than agriculture."

Tribal Vice Chair Susan Masten said it breaks her heart "to see 10,000 plant grows sucking the watersheds dry while our community is on the brink of running out of water." She called it "unacceptable and immoral." The media release compared this situation "to what happened to the tribe in 1849 when men throughout the U.S. flocked to Northern California" in search of gold.

It is in this context that the group calling themselves California Cannabis Voice – Humboldt presented their proposal for a land use ordinance and excise tax measure to the Board of Supervisors. They are proposing local regulations on medicinal marijuana grows larger than five acres in unincorporated parts of the county. A commonly held premise is that some form of marijuana legalizations is in California's future, similar to changes in Colorado, Washington and Oregon. The Cannabis Voice folks seem to be positioning themselves to get in ahead of that and stake out some claim to branding the Humboldt name.

In editorial pieces in the local media, there have been a number of people critical of the Cannabis Voice process and their proposal. All agreed Cannabis Voice can be recognized for bringing up the topic and bringing people together to discuss it.

But, just like the married couple who finally agree to couple's counseling, it is great you are finally talking but you are not going to like everything you hear.

The group has a website that contains their lengthy proposal and I encourage you to visit it. The site is titled "We Are Farmers First" and it is clear their rebranding has already begun. They identify as Farmers, not growers or drug dealers. They refer to cannabis, not marijuana, I guess because marijuana makes it sound like a drug.

Some of their critics argue that smaller grows are more ecologically sustainable. Others point out that the ordinance needs to be stronger on limiting herbicides, pesticides and chemical fertilizers. Others point out that the proposal stresses voluntary compliance and self-regulation. The chaos we have now is the result of self-regulation.

I hope that the potential of increased tax revenue does not blind our decision makers to the very real environmental and social concerns. I hope we can preserve some of the local economic benefits of marijuana cultivation while eliminating the problems of the Black Market. And this may not be popular, but we need some kind of statewide uniformity combined with local discretion. Otherwise, we will make a bigger version of the "medicinal" marijuana situation we created almost 10 years ago.

This is Mike Goldsby for Community Comment