

Bullets Flying Community Comment November 5, 2015 Mike Goldsby

Our friends call it the war zone; the river bank to the west of Fernbridge. Most days there are from 1 to 20 trucks parked down there, with clumps of people shooting rifles and pistols into the river bank. Or to be more accurate, they are emptying their firearms into the continually growing piles of garbage on the riverbank; Garbage they import as targets.

You can hear the shooting from inside your car when you drive into Fernbridge and we can still hear the shooting from our home, five miles away. Sometimes it goes on from dawn until dusk and sometimes even past that. There might be a few sports enthusiasts down there, carefully sighting in their hunting rifles. But it seems most of them are firing their guns as fast as they can, over and over. Like some scene from an episode of The Walking Dead.

I can't say I have gone down there to check it out. Who in their right mind would go down there? Unless you had to. I haven't been down there for years, ever since the shooting got out of control.

Local landowners have had enough and a number of local agencies are involved; Sheriff, Public Works, Fish and Wildlife, County Fish and Game Commission and the Board of Supervisors. I commend Rex and the other Supervisors for bringing this up.

In a letter to the Supervisors, the Alexandre family describes the damage from the target shooting. They have had livestock killed and equipment damaged by stray bullets. Their employees have had to run for cover, with bullets whizzing past their heads.

Apparently, it is trespassing to even go down there. This has been overlooked in the past and a lot of folks have used it for fishing access, duck hunting access or a place to go four-wheeling. Occasionally, some yahoo gets their truck stuck crossing the river. But those activities have not affected the farmers as much as the shooting.

These trespassers have apparently torn down gates, removed rock barriers and even blazed new roads to get to the river bar. Trespassing and wild shooting are followed by rampant garbage dumping. I am very grateful to PacOut Green Team, a group of local volunteers who clean up environmentally polluted areas. They estimate they have removed 5 tons of garbage from Fernbridge in the last year.

The Humboldt County Fish and Game Commission submitted a thoughtful letter, which included some recommendations. One suggestion is signage detailing responsible shooting. That could work but the signs could also become targets. Another suggestion is signage prohibiting illegal dumping. They also suggested increased law enforcement presence, perhaps funded by Measure Z. And they considered surveillance.

I think it will take some violators being charged and prosecuted to start turning that situation around. A fitting community service would be to serve as a work crew assisting PacOut Green Team.

Another solution is a county ordinance banning all shooting, as was done in the Mad River Dunes. That would be sad, but not as sad as what could happen with the current situation.

This is Mike Goldsby for Community Comment