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[phosphate release] violates their discharge permit," he said.

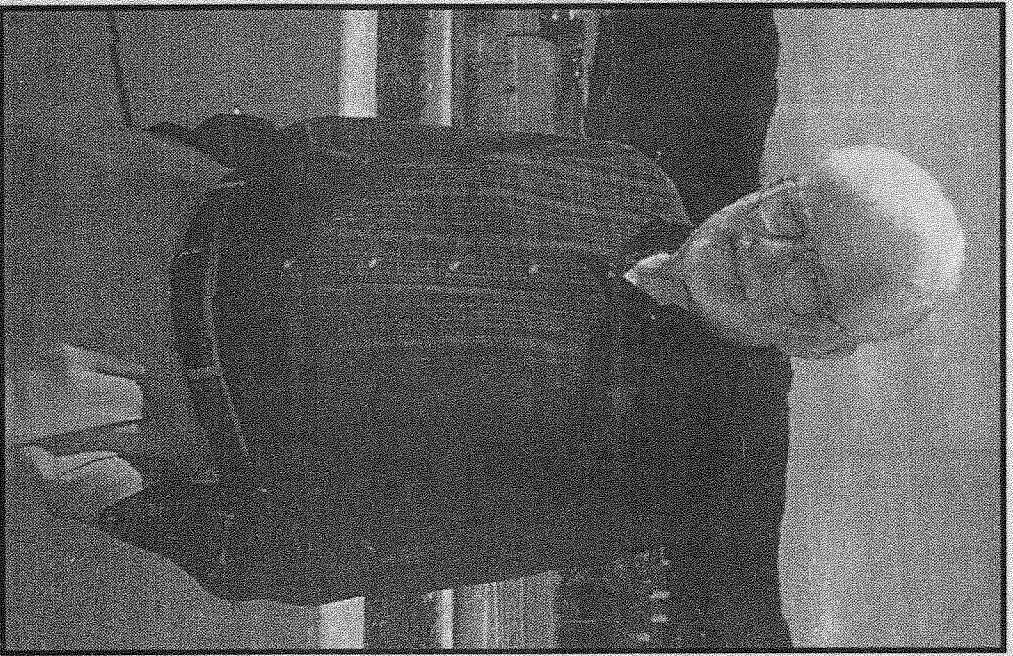
There will likely be more lawsuits. River Watch, a Northern California group concerned about rivers, creeks, streams and ground waters, is beginning to look at all the permits that have been issued in Region I—from Marin to the Oregon border—and plans to bring legal actions against a lot of the dischargers. The group's hope, according to one member, is to get the regional board to revise all permits so they conform to environmental protection laws.

Enforcing those environmental laws has apparently been a weakness of both the state and regional water boards. In the early 1980s, when Santa Rosa was discharging wastewater into the Russian River even more freely, there were sewage spills that caused a public uproar. Among the most publicized acts of protest, by a Russian River resident who went by the name "Manure Man," was the smearing of a truckload of animal excrement in the streets in front of Santa Rosa's City Hall. The smell was said to be powerful, and the gesture received a lot of media attention.

Ultimately, the city's frehanded effluent dumping in the river was stopped with a cease-and-desist order from the Regional Water Quality Control Board. Essentially, the RWQCB told Santa Rosa to reduce discharge to a regulated 1 percent until it could find something else to do with its wastewater. In emergency situations however, the city could discharge 5 percent of the river's flow, via written request to the RWQCB. That was 15 years ago, and now the city has two newly—and some say

underhandedly—acquired state permits issued by the State Water Resource Control Board in March.

The permit applications should have gone to the RWQCB, but the city took advantage of a temporary lack of quorum



Ed Smith

Environmentalist Bill Kortum would prefer to see the treated wastewater used for agriculture rather than steam generation.

on the regional board and went to the state board, where public hearings were held in the middle of the week in Sacramento, a tactic that effectively kept most of the concerned public from showing up to protest.

Those river advocates who did make it to the hearings were greeted with polite silence; they were asked no questions and their concerns were completely ignored, while the state handed Santa Rosa the controversial permits it was requesting.

"Basically, I've been fighting this [discharge] since 1986," according to Brenda Adelman, river expert and spokesperson for the RRWPC. She and others have been working all these years to "persuade Santa Rosa to cease viewing the Russian River as a receptacle for their sewage," and this recent run of events

has her very unhappy—and very suspicious of back-room political deals that might have influenced the process.

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ADELMAN, WHO ATTENDED both hearings for the permits, said the state board hurried to approve the second and final permit on March 15, and the very next day two new regional water board members were announced—making the very quorum needed for the permits to be evaluated by the regional board. Adelman claims the state board knew of the regional appointments when they rushed through the permit approvals.

At the Sacramento hearing Adelman reported, apparently to the state board's complete indifference, that according to the Russian River Watershed Protection Committee, Santa Rosa has been guilty of 2,140 permit violations in the last five years. "The permits were issued anyway. We're deeply concerned," she said, "that the issues we raised at the [hearings] simply were not addressed."

Attorney Silver believes that the way in which the permits were handled was a reflection of political power plays. Silver told the *Sun* that the head of the regional board knew there would be a regional quorum the day after the state board approved the permits, "and he didn't do anything to rearrange to have the meetings in Santa Rosa where more people could come."

Under the new, expanded permit, Santa Rosa discharges 5 percent of the total river flow—averaged over a month—into the Laguna daily from October 1 through May 15 of any year. And the city can dump when