

## **Humboldt needs Measure A before it's too late**

Cumulative human impacts make headlines almost daily — climate catastrophes, plummeting biodiversity, fishing closures, skyrocketing costs for energy and insurance, immigration, fear and anger...

Cumulative impacts are the long-term, gradual and compounding effects of multiple stressors, which can irreversibly damage ecosystems and communities — like the loading of hay on the camel's back 'til it breaks with the last straw.

Humboldt's watersheds may be close to a tipping point. They were once among the world's great salmon producers. They once produced the tallest forests in the world. Their waters once ran slow, cool and clear year-round, moderating temperatures and recharging vast underground reservoirs.

Today our commercial, sport and even tribal salmon fisheries are being curtailed; our forests are declining in health and burning at unprecedented rates; winter flood events are at historic highs, while summer flows are drying up — from generations of industrial-scale impacts:

- fur trade: which eliminated wetland-engineering beavers
- mining: which blasted soil from hillsides into streams, then dredged the streambeds
- logging: which destabilizes soils and destroys integrity of forest canopies, burying salmon spawning beds and overheating habitats
- fishing: which reduces salmon returns, undermining nutrient cycles in waterways and forest soils
- real estate development: which clears forests, extracts water, and alters stream structure
- all of the above bringing invasive species, disease, and pollution

Cannabis farming in the forested watersheds is the latest industry to join this list.

Despite California mandates to evaluate cumulative impacts as early as the 1970s, nearly all Humboldt's major waterways are now listed by the state as impaired.

This should be a priority concern in our county's planning and permitting process. Instead, the county repeatedly fails to evaluate watershed carrying capacities needed for effective regulation, fails to adequately engage federal and state resource agencies and fails to give proper attention to public concerns, so the impacts keep piling on.

Cumulative impacts require complex understanding, historic perspective, and the ability to see beyond present needs of family, friends and communities to the long-term needs of the large, voiceless, and often invisible systems of life we ultimately depend on. They are too easy to ignore until too late — and this is happening under the current cannabis ordinance.

We need Measure A to slow down business as usual and pay attention to this problem which will affect us all — before the last straw.

*Joyce King is a McKinleyville resident.*