

I urge everyone who believes in a healthy cannabis economy AND environment to vote YES on Measure A, the “cannabis initiative” on the ballot March 5.

The current cannabis ordinance, 2.0, has been in many ways a resounding success. An entire industry has grown up here since “recreational” became legal in 2016, supplying a significant portion of California’s consumption, as well as the medical market that is gaining on recreational.

However, that success has come at a cost to our environment and residents due to large industrial cannabis production. Measure A is a reasonable and necessary response to the county’s failure to upgrade 2.0 in light of these impacts.

These impacts were predicted in the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) in 2018 which passed using “Overriding Concerns” concluding that mitigations would not reduce impacts sufficiently. (Final EIR)

Submitters to the EIR identified many of the gaps in regulatory coverage, which echoed Measure A’s provisions: Conduct sub-watershed carrying capacity analyses, limit the number and size of grows, inaugurate unannounced inspections, limit cultivation permits to one per person per parcel, protect streams from water diversions and well connectivity, prohibit routine generator use, and reduce landscape blight and plastics.

Measure A addresses these concerns primarily in two ways: capping the total number of permits at around 1,000, 2,500 fewer than currently possible under 2.0; and limiting new grows to 10,000 sq ft, just like Mendocino and half of Humboldt’s gardens.

It would prevent 970 more permits in the Eel planning watershed, 277 in the Mad, 148 in lower Klamath, and 311 in the Van Duzen. It also reduces inflationary pressures on land prices.

Measure A attempts to rein in what is careening towards a boom cultivation industry. It has nothing to do with other cannabis-related permits, like tourism, distribution or manufacturing.

In 2021, Natalynne DeLapp of the Humboldt County Growers Alliance indicated why they and many in the county oppose lowering the cap on permits: “The light at the end of the tunnel is interstate and international commerce.” “We’re still probably two to three years away from that, so the big question is how the county can support farmers... and how we can use the time we have... so that we hit the ground running when those new markets open up.” (TS, 8/23/21).

Like other booms we have endured, the impacts will outlast the benefits.

Measure A guides us into a more sustainable future, fulfilling the Growers’ Alliance’s vision: “Humboldt’s cannabis businesses cannot compete in a commodity market.” “What makes Humboldt special is our terroir, our story, and our history — that cannot be replicated elsewhere.” “It’s quality over quantity.”

Measure A affects current grows minimally (unless they expand), but in good ways, because it restricts stream water diversion by an additional month, eliminates routine generator use (the state is prohibiting this too), and requires all complaints be resolved before the required annual permit renewal.

Measure A amends the General Plan, and the supervisors will create implementing ordinances. Solar arrays and water storage are encouraged, and ordinances will permit bathrooms, sheds or whatever, so long as they are not associated with expanded cultivation. Any tax rates can also be adjusted appropriately.

Because policymakers, many of whom oppose Measure A, have refused to upgrade 2.0., the initiative process proved to be the only viable avenue to refine 2.0. For example, under 2.0, the Supervisors agreed to conduct annual adaptive management reviews of watershed permits and caps, but none has ever been held. There has never been a carrying capacity evaluation of any watershed, and they are all impaired.

Opponents of measure A argue that the initiative process — the same one that legalized cannabis, twice — is bad policymaking. They never say why they oppose limiting permit numbers and size, notifying neighbors, increasing collaboration with state agencies, making sure a new well does not affect other wells or surface waters, and that roads to new or expanded grows meet standards.

We have already accumulated too many cumulative impacts from supposedly regulated industries that have left us with unraveling watersheds. New threats like Sudden Oak Death stalk the landscape, spread by traffic and transported soils. That's why we have to be so careful with cannabis, to minimize these and unforeseen menaces, and keep it as sustainable as possible for the future economy, neighbors and watersheds.

When Measure A passes, our cannabis industry, neighbors, and salamanders can co-exist peacefully and productively.

Measure A is a gift to our community from our community. Read the Initiative at <https://cannabisinitiative.org>.

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