

## Protect our precious commons

February 4, 2016 • [PATRICIA DAMERY](#)

Comments to the Jan. 28 article, "[Proposed Initiative Targets Watershed Protection](#)," reflect some of the wildfire of opinions around this issue. They raise the question: What is this really about? Property rights? Belligerence at being told what to do on one's own land? Worries about limitations of vineyard conversion in what has become prime real estate and investment opportunity?

The initiative addresses the environment of our watersheds. Finally, Nature has an attorney (Shute, Mihaly, and Weinberger, the firm also drafting our current Agricultural Preserve, the first in the nation). The initiative's stated purpose is that of protecting the "water quality, biological productivity, and economic and environmental values of Napa's streams, watersheds, wetlands and forests, and to safeguard the public health, safety and welfare of the County's residents." In other words, The Commons.

As property and vineyard owners, my husband and I know the annoyances of having to attend to regulations when making decisions about what happens on our land. Yet, as there become more and more of us in our county (and on our planet), as valley floor land is used up and investors turn their sites to the hillsides, it is time we understand the unintended consequences of converting even more of our oak woodlands and forests to vineyards.

Oaks and forests are important parts of the organ of watershed. Watersheds unite us as a community, as citizens of the county, of the country, of the earth. Oaks and forests are important in restoring aquifers and in healthy riparian corridors. Our current General Plan's tactic has been to suggest voluntary oak protections. There is little protection for the newer generations of oaks the ones

that will replace the older ones in time. (Oaks under five inches can be cut without further adieu.)

Yes, older, larger trees should be protected, but the younger generations need protection as well. This initiative makes these protections mandatory and spells them out.

Yes, it means more regulations on us land-owners, but we are also protected from those of us who seem to see only dollar signs and "great cabs" in the surviving oak woodlands and forests.

The wine industry and outside investors are no longer the driver; county government, whose job is to represent all of us and protect our commons, is.

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