

Napa Valley Register: Documentary shows danger to our watersheds

May 19, 2015 • [Patricia Damery](#)

One of the most important documentaries to see in this fifth year of severe drought is “The Russian River: All Rivers -- The Value of an American Watershed.”

The film features the Russian River and the impact of the ignorance, exploitation and neglect of it, particularly by commerce and agriculture. It should be required viewing for every governing official, vintner and voting citizen. It is particularly pertinent for those of us who live here in the Napa Valley and are concerned about its environmental future.

I raised my sons through their early years on that river. We learned her many moods: her rushing insistence in the winter which we could hear even as we drifted to sleep; the way she took the town, flooding homes and businesses alike, when the rains went on for too long.

One of my worst experiences with her happened the summer I took my sons, aged 2½ and 7 months, swimming at the quiet beach that used to be Ginger’s Resort. We sat in the shallow water and played. And then we learned that Santa Rosa had another “accidental” spill of sewage and we were sitting in it. It was during this time that a masked local businessman, affectionately known as Manure Man, took his tractor and manure spreader to Santa Rosa and spread manure around the courthouse, stating, “If it’s good enough for Guerneville, it is good enough for Santa Rosa!”

Sewage spills upstream contaminated our wells for days after. The Press Democrat printed a picture of a Santa Rosa city official drinking a glass of treated water from the sewage treatment plant, showing how safe it was, a picture we scoffed at. These were war days: a battle of those downstream from those farther up. It was really a coming-into-consciousness of how much we impact each other. What is that old saying? — we all live downstream?

“Russian River: All Rivers -- The Value of an American Watershed” is gripping in its scope: This is not just the Russian River, folks! It’s all rivers! If we keep up our ignorance of how we manage water, watersheds and rivers, we are going to be out of water!

It is also a wake-up call: There is still something to be done. This need not be a battle, but rather an awakening to the impact of our actions and a gathering of all sides to protect the commons: our land, our watersheds, our rivers, our air.

This is not about property rights, right-to-farm, profit, tourism, individual entitlements: It is about survival. The documentary has several screenings, including a 7 p.m. screening on Wednesday, May 20, at Copia Center in Napa. Although there is no charge, there is a request for a donation at the door. You do need to make a reservation, however, as there is usually a full house. The screening is sponsored by Friends of the Napa River, Green Party of Napa County, Institute for Conservation Advocacy, Research & Education, Napa Vision 2050 Coalition.

To reserve seats email reservationsmay20@russianriverallrivers.com.