

Media Release

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“CHAINSAW WINE” PROTESTS CONFRONTS THE PETER MICHAEL WINERY AT THE SEA RANCH LODGE

WHAT: Street Theater Protest with Chainsaw-carrying 8' Wine Bottle

WHEN: 5:30 p.m.

WHERE: Sea Ranch Lodge, Sea Ranch, Hwy. 1

Coastal Forest Activists from Sonoma County will once again unveil their own vintage product in front of the Sea Ranch Lodge at Sea Ranch, Thursday, March 26, 5:30 p.m., to call attention to the continued conversion of coastal redwood forests to vineyards. An eight-foot high wine bottle bearing the label “*Pinot Egregio: Chainsaw Wine*” wielding an oversized chainsaw will threaten eight-foot tall redwood trees in its quest to convert the fragile forest ecosystem to a highly cherished vanity crop.

The California Department of Forestry (CDF) is currently approving forestland to vineyard conversions in the coastal forests of Sonoma County. Clear cutting is presently taking place on many acres of conversions spearheaded by vineyard entrepreneurs. They hope to profit by permanently scraping an ancient forest ecosystem off coastal hills and planting the bare ground with wine grapes. The recent CDF issuance of a Negative Declaration for the Peter Michaels Winery conversion in Seaview represents the opening door on a far reaching, serious threat to maintaining water quality, water quantity and biodiversity in north coast watersheds.

Peter Michael Winery has recently applied for a major amendment to a previously issued Negative Declaration in an attempt to sidestep the strict environmental regulations put in place by the CDF and Water Quality. This is an example of a large, multi-national corporation who refers to itself as “in keeping with the highest level of environmental responsibility”, and then attempting to break the rules. If the public had not been watching - they would have gotten away with it; and all the while calling themselves “stewards of the land”!

“The deforestation in these plans being approved and those pending is being done without any thorough study of the cumulative effects from all of the existing, pending, and potential future conversions”, says Chris Poehlmann of the Coastal Forest Alliance, an environmental citizens group from the Annapolis area concerned about widespread forestland conversion. “These planned coastal vineyards are in water scarce areas and utilize large lined reservoirs that prevent natural runoff from entering streams and the river. Evidence is mounting that rivers throughout the North Coast are experiencing greatly reduced summer flow due to extensive vineyard development.”

Environmental groups are concerned about dangers these conversions pose to the surrounding areas. The complex forest ecosystem acts as a sponge that absorbs winter rainfall and releases it slowly over the year to maintain fish, riparian habitat, and clean, safe water for domestic use. In addition, long lists of toxic pesticides and herbicides used by commercial vineyards have been shown to disrupt soil and nutrient cycles, causing irreversible damage. No studies exist looking into the effects of this potential chemical cocktail on salmonids and other downstream fauna and aquatic life.

“I think the majority of America’s wine consumers would be heartbroken to see that the Redwood Empire is being carved away to make room for the Redwine Empire,” adds Toben Dilworth of the Occidental-based Town Hall Coalition.

In 2002, The Wine Institute released its Code of Sustainability in response to drawing fire from environmental groups over their development

practices. Although both groups acknowledge the progress the Wine Industry has made in making improvements on existing vineyards, the loss of irreplaceable redwood forests still continues.