

# Dry wells spur Mount Veeder water dispute

## Supervisors to hear winery appeal

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A property owner in the 1000 block of Mount Veeder Road has appealed the approval of a use permit for an adjacent winery, alleging that vineyard irrigation by the winery's owners caused her spring to run dry.

The Napa County Planning Commission approved the use permit for the Woolls Ranch Winery last fall, permitting owners Paul and Betty Woolls to produce 50,000 gallons of wine annually on a 236-acre parcel that features 32 acres of vines.

Neighbor Patricia Simpson, who owns a nearby property that her daughter, son-in-law and their children reside on, appealed that use permit and contends the Woolls' water usage resulted in a spring she owns a water right for to dry up — something that had never happened before.

The Board of Supervisors was scheduled to hear the appeal last week, but continued the matter until May.

Simpson contends that another neighbor's well also ran dry because of the vineyard irrigation, also for the first time in its history.

In a letter to the county Planning Department last fall, attorney Thomas Adams of Dickenson, Peatman & Fogarty said that well was drilled in 2009 to a depth of 400 feet. Its pump produced 100 gallons a minute, the letter states.

The Woolls drilled their well to 600 feet 40 feet away, according to the letter, and as a result the other well suffered a complete failure, causing the pump to burn out. The Woolls purchased 1.75 million gallons of water from the city of Napa last summer and trucked it up to their property, according to city records.

In response to the allegations, attorney Brian Russell, who was hired by the Woolls, wrote a letter contending that well possibly

## Well

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wasn't drilled deep enough to function correctly in that area of Mount Veeder, and may have been overused.

Gary Margadant, president of the Mount Veeder Stewardship Council, said the dispute raises broader issues of groundwater usage among residents and vineyard owners in the groundwater-reliant area.

Margadant and other members of the stewardship council have urged the county to consider revising its groundwater usage standards, which stipulate that hillside vineyards are permitted on half an acre-foot of groundwater for every acre of the project.

He said the Woolls drilled three wells that were dry before settling on the productive one, which is a sign that groundwater is a spo-

radic commodity.

"Half an acre-foot is available everywhere," Margadant said. "The water up on the mountain here is spotty, and really that availability is a nice thing."

He said the issue becomes compounded — and more disputes result — as vineyards are packed in closer together, and residences become less spread out.

"It's a nice thing if everyone is spread out," Margadant said. "The future is not spread out."

This water issue is occurring during a major drought, with historically low rainfall in Northern California.

Margadant is encouraging his neighbors to contact the Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission and planning staff with their concerns about the issue.

"People want to put the vines much closer," Margadant said. "They want to get a payback on their investment but that doesn't help the

neighbors much.

"We're trying to press upon people that it could happen to you, and ask if they want to work with the county to impress on them to change."