

TO: NAPA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

My husband and I have resided on Soda Canyon Road for over 37 years and live in proximity to the proposed Mountain Peak Winery.

What has changed since the Atlas Fire, October 8, 2017?

The destruction by the Atlas Fire of:

- surrounding vineyards [they burn]
- part of Rector Canyon [in exact proximity to proposed Mountain Peak Winery site]
- many destroyed private residences [134 of 163]
- damage to Soda Canyon wineries
- two neighbors lost their life in the fire [could not escape or properly shelter-in -place].

And

- A small section of guardrail was installed that has not slowed traffic.
- A few patches of new asphalt [no widening of the road]
- And most recently, adding to the already overburdened amount of traffic on Soda Canyon Road the approval of another 150 acres to be developed by Gallo/Stagecoach, thereby further depleting the Rector Watershed, the supply of precious water so necessary to fight a wildfire and/or sustain local residents. And this while California and the Napa Valley are in a severe drought, with the Town of Yountville [recipient of Rector Watershed water] to be immediately reduced by 20%

It appears the BoS staff in making recommendations regarding the Mountain Peak Winery Remand Hearing is under the erroneous impression that all residents of Soda Canyon Road made it out safely at the on-set of the Atlas Peak Fire, October 8, 2017. And that any proposed visitors to the proposed winery would likewise be safe. That simply IS A FALSEHOOD.

Allow me to recount the terror of that night and following days... the trauma of a life-threatening event that has remained with my husband

and I ever since, of forced sheltering-in-place, and attempts to save our home.

October 8, 2017 Dante's Inferno Napa Style

On the evening of October 8, 2017, I was home watching tv. Huge, terrifying wind estimated at 75+mph had kicked up. At about 10:30 pm the power went out, not an unusual occurrence up on the mountain. I found candles and flashlights and pattered in the kitchen until about 11pm decided to go to bed. A small voice cautioned me to stay in my street clothes. I went to the bedroom window and saw fire on the entire rim behind the Antinori Winery to the south, that extended to the mouth of Soda Canyon Road at ~6 miles where it turns into Foss Valley. I also noticed a traffic jam of red tail-lights backed up at that juncture. [This is where the proposed Mountain Peak Winery would be constructed].

I woke my husband and we went outside in the hurricane force wind to get a better view. The wind was blowing from the north and the fire away from us. I later found out that all of my neighbors across the way in Foss Valley had been air vac-ed out from Antinori at 10:30pm and our neighbors on the first 6 miles of Soda Canyon had self evacuated around 9:15pm. My husband drove down the dirt road to the paved road to get a better view and I drove to the house in front of ours to get cell service. A close friend who lived in the Silverado Country Club called to warn us of the fire coming our way just before he had to evacuate himself [post script he lost his house as did 100's of Silverado County Club neighbors].

Back at our home we hurriedly grabbed our cats and put them in their carriers, put their food and water in containers, grabbed computers and important papers and packed our two trucks in preparation to evacuate. We took out and attached our firehoses. We soon realized that we had no choice but to 'shelter in place' as the only road out was entirely blocked by a raging fire.

Old Foss Valley road that used to lead to Atlas Peak Road (now closed off as part of Antinori was likewise inaccessible) and like Soda Canyon,

Atlas Peak Road was completely engulfed in fire. So we brought the cats back in the house and sheltered in place until daylight. We took turns keeping an eye on the fire yet neither of us slept.

As October 9 dawned, the wind had subsided and the fire slowly crept down the mountain behind Antinori toward us. Without power we had no communication with the outside world or our daughters were frantically trying to get help to us. I was puzzled at the total lack of helicopter water drops?

My husband packed a suitcase with clothes. I was not motivated to take anything but finally decided to pretend I was going to vacation so went to pack. I looked at the closet. I couldn't decide. Fortunately most of my sundry travel bag was full. OK. Underwear ✓ pair jeans ✓ pjs ✓ a few shirts ✓ my down jacket ✓ slippers ✓. Important papers ✓ empty the file drawer into a box ✓ Put all this in the car, then watch and wait.

With no electricity and no cell service I found a small battery operated radio but couldn't find the local channel. We had no idea what was going on. And no way to communicate with the outside world. I walked outside and watched the fires continue to creep closer and move toward Haystack. I wondered why there were no helicopters or planes dropping water or retardant?

Our family was frantic. They did not know where we were and if we were OK. They didn't know if we got out. Our daughter called everybody she had a phone number for. No luck. She called every hospital, the police, the fire department, the sheriff department, dispatch. Dispatch told her there was nobody up on Soda Canyon. She knew better and harassed them to the point they sent a helicopter to evacuate anyone left.

About 2:30 pm in the afternoon I heard a helicopter buzzing over our house. A helicopter circled our house and a bull horn said EVACUATE

NOW! They landed in a next door neighbors field. We knew several of our neighbors were still here. We decided it was time to evacuate. As my husband and I were already packed and driving our trucks, they let us drive out. (Post script: it was only on the insistence of our daughter with the Sheriff Dept that the helicopter was sent. The Sheriffs Dept thought no one was up on Soda Canyon however our daughter insisted ‘her parents were up there!’)

It was quite a shock to drive down Soda Canyon where 80%+ of the homes were a total loss. The ground was grey ash with black stick trees, an occasional dead animal (cows) and downed live power lines everywhere and fires still burning. So very sad and bleak. Like a WWI battleground.

Chapter II - October 10

As my husband and the sheriff deputy drive through our gate at approximately 3:30pm, fire has entirely surrounded our home. Our neighbor, the local volunteer fire chief is there with his buddy and our neighborhood fire engine [that the 2007-08 Grand Jury had managed to convince the county to purchase].

My husband hops out of the sheriff’s car and says, “I hope you realize I will not be going back with you.” “It’s your choice” the sheriff deputy says as she leaves.

There are no other fire engines or fire fighters on Soda Canyon. Still no helicopter water drops.

My husband and the volunteer fire chief fight the fire around our home through the wee hours of the night. The fire had burned to within a foot of the studio and propane tank. Exhausted they feel they have fought the fire back far enough and the wind has died down, so both retire to get some much needed rest.

However only an hour or so later [around 2:30am], my husband wakes up seeing orange flames again working toward the house and

surrounding the pool. He jumps from the couch. The fire has melted the water lines down by the pool.

My husband uses the only resource left to him, our old John Deere tractor. The work-horse and savior of so much. With the front loader, he literally pushes the fire away from the house.

As the sun rose through the smoke choking air, the Volunteer Fire Chief returns to check on things and continues to help my husband.

Later my husband shares that he learned a lot fighting the fire with the Volunteer Fire Chief...*mainly to keep calm and a clear head no matter the situation...*a primary survival skill of fire fighters.

-0-

Just recalling the experience of the Atlas Fire brings tears. Fast forward to the present.

I ask you to consider what would be the lasting impression of a visiting tourist in a similar situation? Having to shelter-in-place in a building or wine cave, surrounded by smoke filled air, while the world around you explodes in flame? Trapped, you cannot leave.

What hasn't changed since the Atlas Fire?

- The horrendous high winds are more frequent.
- Wildfire persists in the Soda Canyon/Foss Valley area and across most the hills surrounding the Napa Valley. 2020 LNC Complex fire burned even more vineyards/hillsides in the Soda Canyon/ Foss Valley and took another neighbors home.
- Water, the life blood of Soda Canyon residents and the only thing that will extinguish a fire is being syphoned off for more vineyards.
- PG&E in order to avoid more lawsuits, regularly shuts off the power when there is a 'red-flag' warning, thereby robbing local residents and wineries of their ability to access well water for any sustainable time.

The County will never put up enough money to sufficiently improve Soda Canyon Road to make it a truly 'collector' road. Ignoring the hard experience, warnings and pleas of local residents, to please reconsider approval of the Mountain Peak Winery, sets up the area [and Napa Valley's reputation] for absolute disaster. Inviting visitors to 'party' at a winery facility at the end of a 'dead-end' road and I emphasize DEAD, is ludicrous.

Common sense and decency dictate that you, the Board of Supervisors, reconsider approval of the Mountain Peak Winery. Don't let another wildfire/winery disaster be your legacy and the moniker of the Napa Valley.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration.

Diane and Alan Shepp