

https://news.bloombergenvironment.com/environment-and-energy/napas-water-wine-fight-likely-wont-fade-with-latest-compromise?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=NEVE&utm_campaign=00000169-bfd5-d907-a1eb-bfd591d50000

Bloomberg Environment

Napa's Water-Wine Fight Likely Won't Fade With Latest Compromise

- Supervisors expected to approve woodland, watershed protections April 9
- Lauded, lamented restrictions would take effect by Memorial Day

By [Joyce E. Cutler](#)

Napa County's proposal to enact woodland and watershed protections, a compromise that makes no one happy, returns April 9 for final approval.

Hundreds of hours of staff and volunteer time, and lobbying, led to a [proposed ordinance](#) that would impose some limits on how much development, including vine planting, can take place in the renowned region.

The Napa County Board of Supervisors is expected to unanimously approve the measure.

Proponents, including members of the wine industry, say the measure fails to protect the future and embrace resilience measures demanded by climate change. Opponents, including members of the wine industry, argue there is no science behind the decision or economic consideration for impact of limiting development.

"Not only have we not been able to assess that, I don't think anybody's been able to assess" the economic impact, said Rex Stults, Napa Valley Vintners industry relations senior director. The trade group's 553 members include Treasury Wine Estates-owned Beringer Vineyards, Caymus Vineyards, and Constellation Brands-owned Robert Mondavi.

The Napa County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the proposed ordinance on first reading April 2.

Setbacks, Replanting

The proposed ordinance adopts some of the provisions in the unsuccessful woodland and watershed protection [Measure C](#), the initiative that prompted supervisors to ask county staff to craft the ordinance. Measure C lost last June, 49.1 percent to 50.9 percent.

Ordinance provisions include a new minimum 50-foot setback from watersheds, double the current setback; a one-time pass for rebuilding structures burned in wildfires or lost to other natural disasters to 125 percent of the lost footprint; and mandated retention of 70 percent of the current tree canopy.

The proposal also would require, as did Measure C, a three-for-one replacement requirement for removing vegetation.

In the Red

The proposed ordinance does very little to help the Napa ecosystems in their resiliency to climate change, said Ross Middlemiss, a Center for Biological Diversity attorney in Concord, Calif.

“Full-throated opposition from the wine industry is really shortsighted. It’s prioritizing short-term economic gain for long-term sustainability,” Middlemiss said.

Wine is Napa’s marquee agricultural product. Wine grape production in 2017, the most recent figures available, was worth \$750.8 million. The total value of all agricultural production was \$757.1 million, the county agricultural commission [reported](#) last April. Red wine grapes, led by cabernet sauvignon, were worth \$656.09 million in 2017.

The next largest crop after wine grapes is livestock, at \$3.38 million.

Tourism is Napa County’s second-largest industry, supporting an estimated 13,437 jobs, with a combined payroll of \$387 million, [Visit Napa Valley](#) said last April.

The county also is a biological “hot spot,” as one of a handful of Mediterranean biomes around the world, said Jim Wilson, co-author of the [unsuccessful initiative](#) that would have capped additional woodland development at 795 acres.

The fight has come to a head as devastating and deadly fires continue to consume lives and livelihoods in California. Heavy pounding rains this winter led to flooding and mudslides that were cited as examples for the need of increased regulation, or at least increased enforcement of existing laws.

The different camps agree that the ordinance, if passed, won’t end the fight over how many protections should be enacted.

Civil Napa War

The ordinance takes “baby steps” to address needed environmental protection, Wilson said.

“I would say it’s grossly insufficient to prevent the county’s environmental resources deteriorating further, and I guess I say that’s because the county continues to ignore the best available science on land use policies that would actually enhance the integrity of the watershed and its biodiversity,” Wilson said.

Counters Stults: “The primary science used throughout this process was political science.”

Dozens of hours of public meetings, including those arranged by Rep. Mike Thompson (D), a winegrower who represents the region, followed the county last December proposing an ordinance to address issues Measure C raised.

“Allalong, the Napa Valley Vintners expressed our support for the process the county was using where the people we elected to make these decisions would ultimately make them,” Stults said. “If there were mistakes made, and maybe there were, who knows, if there were mistakes made they have the ability on a given Tuesday with three votes to adjust it. In our eyes, this would be a better process.”

The board next year will get a report on the ordinance, if enacted. The board’s composition could change with three supervisors up for re-election.

“They say there’s only three political issues in Napa Valley,” Stults said. “That’s land use, land use, land use. And this hits all three.”

By [*Joyce E. Cutler*](#)

To contact the reporter on this story: Joyce E. Cutler in San Francisco at jcutler@bloomberglaw.com

To contact the editors responsible for this story: Gregory Henderson at ghenderson@bloombergenvironment.com; Jean Fogarty at jfogarty@bloombergenvironment.com; Rob Tricchinelli at rticchinelli@bloombergenvironment.com