

When A Friend Of The River Took A Stand

By PEGGY R. TOWNSEND

Sentinel Staff Writer

It was early morning when Mark Dubois hiked to a secluded spot on the Stanislaus River and chained himself to a rock.

He stayed there for a week, held to a spot that was slated to be flooded by the Army Corps of Engineers.

Searchers patrolled the flooding river in vain looking for him.

When he finally came out, he had reached his goal. Gov. Edmund G. Brown Jr. had signed a letter threatening to sue the Army Corps of Engineers if they flooded the area where Dubois sat.

The river remains stalemated at that level today.

Now, Dubois looks back on his experience with whimsy and a touch of pride.

The tall, bearded 30-year-old said on a recent visit to Santa Cruz that his sojourn on the river was a "personal statement." He wanted to demonstrate his commitment to saving the Stanislaus River Canyon above an area known as Parrots Ferry.

At the time, he said, he didn't think the Army Corps would actually flood the water and drown him. "I was serious about it," he said. "Before I went in, I touched down and thought 'am I really ready to do this?'"

"The closer it got, the higher I felt and I realized I could do whatever I wanted," said Dubois.

"I figured I had a 5 percent chance I would succeed, a 5 percent chance I would join the rest of the critters at the bottom and an 80 percent chance the corps would find me. I was surprised when they didn't."

Dubois, who is currently co-director of the Friends of the River group, came to Santa Cruz recently to talk about energy and local citizens' own fight over the San Lorenzo River.

He said he chained himself to the rock at a time when others had made their own personal statements by lying in front of bulldozers or chaining themselves to giant redwood trees.

"I sat in the Stanislaus Canyon early one morning and watched the sun rise and the leaves reach out and I felt all the energy and life of that place," he said.

"At that time I realized that at some point I might need to make a statement of some kind."

When other methods of stopping the Army Corps of Engineers from flooding the river behind the New Melones Dam, Dubois acted.

He said he first scouted his spot in a kayak, then returned the following morning and chained himself to a rock.

Dubois said he could see patrol boats searching the river for him so that flooding of the canyon could continue.

When patrols got close, he simply crawled into a cranny in the rock and covered himself with a camouflage blanket. No one seemed to be able to see him.

His days were spent sitting in the canyon,

thinking and doing a little reading.

"It just felt really nice to be there watching the sunrise and sunset and all the little critters." He said he ate nuts and fruit brought in by a friend but most of the time he was alone.

His actions brought the attention of the media from as far away as Los Angeles. Gov. Brown wrote a letter threatening to sue the corps if they flooded above a certain point.

The flooding stopped and Dubois came out.

Later, he was sent a bill for the search and rescue mission he prompted. "But I wrote them back and told them politely that I wasn't lost and I also didn't think I was in danger because the corps had complete control of the flooding." He did not pay the bill.

Nowadays, Dubois spends much of his time with the Friends of the River organization. His time on the river was a "symbol."

The Stanislaus River and its latest dam, the New Melones, was a "symbol," he said. "It was a symbol that maybe we can't afford to do this anymore."

The Melones Dam was not economical to build, nor will it pay for itself in the future, Dubois claimed. "We can't afford it economically and we can't afford it environmentally," he said. "The last few rivers are precious."

To him, the best solution for the nation's energy crisis "is to put creative energy into learning how to make energy go further."

"We in the United States have allowed waste because energy is cheap." In Europe, energy is



Mark Dubois

more expensive and it is used more efficiently, he said.

He said the San Lorenzo River is part of that battle to preserve what we have.

He also praised the local members of the Save the San Lorenzo Association for their work on behalf of the river.

"All of us have to wake up to the fact we can no longer afford to go in the direction we are going."

For information about Friends of the River, call 335-7078.