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## BRICE JONES, ARTESA OPEN ROUTE ACROSS LAND FOR ANIMALS ANNAPOLIS WINEGROWERS TO ESTABLISH WILDLIFE CORRIDORS

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THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

In what may be the first concession by Sonoma County grape growers to an emerging environmental cause, two Annapolis vintners are placing their fencing specifically to allow wild animals to migrate across their property.

The moves by Brice Jones, who is developing vineyards in Annapolis after being fired from Sonoma-Cutrer Winery in Windsor, and Napa-based Artesa Winery are a response to a growing concern by biologists that development -- even if it is agricultural -- on wildlands interrupts migratory patterns and threatens native animals.

"We're not sure it's a real issue, but we're willing to take a little land out of vineyard production to see if it works," said Cliff Putnam, vineyard manager for Jones.

Jones plans to move one of the fences on his 55-acre parcel, and Artesa, which owns 300 acres, would align its fences with Jones'. This will create a mile-long buffer zone along Patchett Creek, from the headwaters to forestland owned by Mendocino Redwoods Co.

The two vintners are not the first in Sonoma County to seek to preserve a wildlife **corridor** -- the Sonoma Ecology Center in Sonoma holds that distinction.

But Artesa and Jones may well be blazing the trail for other grape growers in responding to what is developing into a statewide and even national issue, said Nick Frey, executive director of the Sonoma County Grape Growers Association.

"I think wildlife **corridors** have probably not been a priority in the past, but today more and more grape growers are thinking about how

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they can do that," he said.

``We recommend vineyard developers limit their fences to the grape area and be aware of wildlife **corridors** when they lay out the vineyard," Frey said.

While wildlife biologists have long known that animals migrate to find food and water and to breed, the routes they used were not widely known.

One of the first attempts at mapping came last month when the California **Wilderness** Coalition, a nonprofit group in Davis, working with the state Parks Department and the U.S. Geological Survey, released a 79-page report on wildlife **corridors** in California, including 10 key **corridors** in Sonoma County.

Interest in wildlife **corridors** is growing because scientists believe parks and wild areas by themselves have not been enough to sustain wildlife, said Paul Spitler, executive director of the **Wilderness** Coalition, which seeks to preserve California's wildland areas.

Alaska, North Carolina and New Jersey have established wildlife **corridors**. Florida, which began preserving **corridors** in the 1980s, has issued \$5 billion in bonds to pay for them.

In Sonoma County, the nonprofit Sonoma Ecology Center has been working for six years to create a 5-mile-long wildlife **corridor** in the Valley of the Moon, from Sonoma Mountain to the Mayacmas Mountains.

The project, the first of its kind in Sonoma County, seems likely to succeed because much of the land is owned by the county and the state. The private property involved already has conservation easements, said Caitlin Cornwall, assistant director at the Sonoma Ecology Center.

That's not the case in Annapolis, the hot new area for growing premier pinot noir grapes, where land is almost entirely in private ownership.

Like vintners elsewhere, Annapolis grape growers often have chosen to fence their entire property to keep out grape-munching deer, even if the vineyards are only on part of the property.

But at the urging of Doug Simmonds, coordinator of Gualala River Watershed Council, and with the help of the Department of Fish and Game, Jones and Artesa are doing something different.

``Patchett Creek is a really nice riparian area and it would be great to have it preserved in perpetuity for wildlife," said Stacy Martinelli, an

environmental specialist with Fish and Game.

**Corridors** that link wild habitat areas have become vital because animals such as deer, coyotes, foxes, bobcats, bears and mountain lions are prevented by roads, fences, homes and vineyards from ranging freely as they once did.

Without the **corridors**, the animals become isolated in habitat islands and run a greater risk of dying out because of genetic weaknesses caused by inbreeding, said Allan Buckmann, a biologist with Fish and Game.

They also are less likely to escape natural disasters, such as flood and fire.

Annapolis residents, who are fighting to stop vineyard expansion by Jones and Artesa, support wildlife **corridors** but say the issue needs to be addressed areawide, not project by project.

"You need to look at the cumulative impacts, and wildlife **corridors** are one of the impacts, along with traffic, housing, water hydrology and pesticides," said Chris Poehlmann of Annapolis, an opponent of vineyard expansion.

Still, the effort by the Annapolis vintners and the Ecology Center in Sonoma Valley has caught the attention of Sonoma County officials.

Preservation of creek and river **corridors**, which often double as wildlife **corridors**, is one of the priorities of the county Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District, which uses sales tax money to acquire land and development rights.

A dozen local conservation groups also have asked the county Board of Supervisors to include wildlife **corridors** in the coming revision of the county general plan, a blueprint for future land use.

Supervisor Mike Reilly, whose district includes Annapolis, said he welcomed the suggestion.

"I think it's absolutely appropriate for us to look at wildlife transfers as part of our land-use planning," he said.

You can reach Staff Writer Carol Benfell at 521-5259 or e-mail [cbenfell@pressdemocrat.com](mailto:cbenfell@pressdemocrat.com). PHOTO: 2 color by John Burgess/The Press Democrat  
MAP: color by The Press Democrat: Where the wild things walk

1: Representatives from Brice Jones vineyards lead a tour early last month along a fence on the edge of a wildlife **corridor** that will be created along a creek. Jones and the owners of Artesa Winery are

cooperating on the **corridor**.

2: An antler shed by a young deer lies on an old access road between Highway 12 and the Sonoma Developmental Center. The road, one of many crisscrossing the Sonoma Valley wildlife **corridor**, is heavily used by deer.

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