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## Walking the clearcut forest

Patty Payne

There used to be a great place to hike in back of White Pines Lake near Arnold in Calaveras County. I would park my car at the lake and my dog and I would hike up a near-by hill. Because there wasn't a trail, we would scramble through the bushes that grew under the trees. The hike was quite strenuous but well worth it because, when you got to the top, you found yourself in one of the most beautiful places. My destination took me to a large Oak tree, which I would have to squeeze around, then to a flat place to sit where I could look down the cliff onto White Pines Lake. Crows and other large birds would drift in the breeze below me. Sometimes I would bring a book to read, other times I would just let my mind wander off with the beauty of the place.

This wonderful place is not there any more. It has been clear-cut along with several other 20-acre parcels that run parallel to Highway 4. Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI), the largest private landowner in California, has been busy clearcutting their land. SPI owns around 4,300 acres in the upper San Antonio Creek watershed: they are clear-cutting 50% of that under what is called the USA Timber Harvest Plan (THP). After clearcutting the land, SPI sprays it with herbicides, to prevent dogwood, oak and other broad leaf plants from growing. Then they replant with mostly pines, creating a tree plantation. And if you have ever visited one, contrary to SPI public statements, a tree plantation will never be a forest.

If you enjoy driving on the back roads that wind through the forest, it will not take you long to see for yourself what a clear-cut looks like. The clear-cuts that I have seen took everything but a couple of straggly trees in the 20-acre unit and then bulldozed, leaving only a couple of stumps and bare dirt. Because they are used in products like particle board (which are made up of ground up wood fibers), very few limbs are left to nourish the ground.

The remaining dirt is like powder and flies up in the air when you walk on it. The soil erosion that comes with the rain clogs the creeks and streams. Eighty percent of the state's urban water supply originate from forested watersheds. And, just like people, fish also need clean water to survive.

The USA Timber Harvest Plan was only one of the timber harvest plans being submitted by SPI. The Cedar Flat THP is located next to Big Trees State Park. Giant Sequoias, old growth sugar pines, ponderosa pines, incense cedar and white fir make up a unique habitat within and adjacent to the state park. The Cedar Flat THP, along with clear-cutting, planned to log units using a method called "variable retention" harvesting. Variable retention may not

sound like a clear-cut, but it still removes 95-99% of the trees in a 20-acre unit. This will have a tremendous impact on the habitat of this unique region.

I always thought that the forest was a given, like the air we breathe and the waters of the streams in which we swim and fish. There are rare birds and rare and even more mysterious insects that live in the forest trees. Birds build and hide their nests in the forest, each species in their own special place. The shady ground under the trees is a perfect place for mushrooms to grow. These mushrooms will be eaten by slugs and squirrels; what's left will turn into a black slime that will be consumed by bacteria. The fruiting head of the mushroom is only a small part of the extensive body that, mostly unseen, plays a vital role in the forest.

The forest provides us with many raw materials for life, from food to tools. Forests ecologically maintain our atmosphere and moderate our climate. California has some of the most sensitive and beautiful forests in the world.

Let's help save them by promoting selective cutting and not clear-cutting.

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