

Board of Supervisors Meeting - January 14, 2002

Subject: Upper San Antonio (USA) Creek Timber Harvest

My name is Bruce Castle. I live in Forest Meadows, Murphys, CA.
I am representing myself.

The reasons I have come to this Board meeting today are as follows:

1. To express my objection to clear-cutting.
2. To show aerial and ground photographs of the USA Creek Timber Harvest.
3. To express my concern about timber harvesting over the next decade and beyond, e.g., that cornrow type tree plantations will replace the preponderance of natural forests
4. To recommend actions the Board can take, e.g., establish County Rules.

Let me make it clear at the outset that I do not object to timber harvesting. I believe timber harvesting is actually healthy for the forest.

There is insufficient time within my allotted five minutes to develop this story fully, so I have prepared this text in the hope that each of you will read what I have to say. I would like this text to become an official record of this meeting.

Objections:

- 1a. I object to the clear-cut timber harvest method being used by Sierra Pacific Industries (SPI) in the Arnold/Dorrington area. When I drive up Hwy 4 past Forest Meadows, I can see several areas of clear cuts near the top of a ridge about 5 miles away. While driving on Hwy 4 between the 5000' elevation marker and Dorrington, I see clear cuts through the trees (USA Creek Timber Harvest).
- 1b. I bought a house in Arnold in 1990, in part, to ride my mountain bike through the forests. I have ridden hundreds of miles of roads along the Hwy 4 corridor from Hwy 49 to Alpine Lake. Two of my favorite areas were right where the USA Creek Timber Harvest is located and O'Neil Creek (over an adjacent ridge). Now, there is tremendous devastation through clear-cutting in this local recreation area ... our backyard.

USA Creek Timber Harvest poster:

- 2a. I feel so strongly about the on-going destruction within the USA Creek Timber Harvest that I asked myself. . . What can I do to publicize my concerns?

I decided to prepare a poster that illustrates this destruction visually. I commissioned a pilot and two photographers to take these and 200 other photographs. Every photograph fully documents the harvest units (their assigned unit numbers) and the dates the photographs were taken.

My intent is to present this story to the Board today and to other public forums in the future.

- 2b. The USA Timber Harvest Plan (THP), approved November 2, 1999, calls for the cutting of **918 acres** in **51 discreet harvest units** in the Upper San Antonio Creek watershed. This covers a distance of nearly 6.5 miles between White Pines Lake and two miles above Camp Connell. The THP includes **884 acres earmarked for clearcutting** and **34 acres for seed tree seed step harvesting**. About 80 percent of the harvest units have been cut thus far.

The poster includes a detailed topographical map of the USA Creek Timber Harvest, a watercourse map, text from the Forest Practice Rules pertaining to esthetic values, many aerial and ground photographs of clear cuts, and several examples of seed tree seed step harvesting. The latter harvest method is my obvious choice over the clear cutting method. However, selective cutting is still the best method, in my view.

Concerns:

3a. According to Forest Practice Rules related to minimum stocking standards, Section 1071, SPI is required to regenerate the forest by planting seedlings and, in a few units, closely monitor the natural reforestation. If the natural reforestation fails, SPI is required to intervene by supplemental planting of seedlings. I am concerned about how seriously SPI will comply with these rules. Thus far, I see no evidence of seedling planting in any of the harvested units. However, I would expect them to start planting later this year.

3b. The responsibilities to monitor the quantity and quality of the reforestation and enforce the reforestation rules have been granted to the California Department of Forestry (CDF) by the Forestry Board. I am concerned about how seriously CDF will execute these responsibilities.

3c. **Esthetic Values -**

Public Resources Code, Section 750-751-Professional Foresters Law (Abstract): The purpose of this article is to declare the existence of a public interest...and to provide for the regulation of persons who practice the profession of forestry...and through that regulation to enhance... **the preservation of scenic beauty...**

Z'Berg-Nejedly Forest Practice Act: Section 4513. Intent of Legislature.

It is the intent of the Legislature to create and maintain an effective and comprehensive system of regulation and use of all timberlands so as to assure that:

- (a) Where feasible, the productivity of timberlands is restored, enhanced, and maintained.
- (b) The goal of maximum sustained production of high-quality timber products is achieved while giving consideration to values relating to recreation, watershed, wildlife, range and forage, fisheries, regional economic vitality, employment, and **aesthetic enjoyment**.

I am concerned that the Forestry Board and CDF are paying little attention to these values when they approve THPs.

3d. Hwy 4 enjoys a Scenic Highway status, but if the buffer zone between the highway and the clear cuts is not wide enough, it will cease to be scenic. The same holds true for secondary paved and public USFS Co-Op roads that course through many timber harvest areas in this County. There are no buffer zones on most of the roads in the USA Creek Timber Harvest. This produces a strong negative visual impact for residents and tourists alike.

3e. The Forest Practice Rules, Section 953.1, allow timber operators to harvest adjacent areas within their ownership boundaries after the planted or naturally produced seedlings in the regeneration units have attained an average height of five feet or that at least five years have passed since the planting. This is known as the five feet or five years rule.

I am concerned that SPI will come back in approximately 5 years, then again in 10 years to clear-cut the rest of the Upper San Antonio Creek watershed. That is, I am concerned that in 10 to 12 years from now we will see cornrow type forest plantations and virtually all of this forest will be harvested. If this point is reached, it will cease being a true forest and its use, as a recreational area will be greatly diminished.

- 3f. I am also concerned about the ecological impact of clearcutting, and the probable adverse economic impact associated with massive clearcutting, not only in the Upper San Antonio Creek watershed, but in other Calaveras County locations as well.

Recommendations:

- 4a. The Forest Practice Act, Section 4516.5 provides a mechanism for counties to "... recommend that the board [Board of Forestry] adopt additional rules and regulations for the content of timber harvesting plans and the conduct of timber operations to take account of local needs." These become County Rules upon approval by the Board of Forestry. I believe that Calaveras County should have representation and a voice in forest management activities that affect this county. The provisions in this section of the Act seem ideally suited to give Calaveras County this voice.

Therefore, my recommendation is to have the Supervisors form a committee whose tasks would be to study the issues surrounding timber harvest plans and timber operations and present a report showing how the adoption of certain County Rules would "... take account of local needs." Further, I would like to see this Board establish a time limit by which the committee would complete this task.

- 4b. Forest management is a very contentious issue between timber operators, property rights advocates, ranchers, cattlemen, environmentalists and others. In addition, I believe the Calaveras County Board of Supervisors is split on the forest management issue.

Therefore, in recognition of these difficulties, I recommend that each Supervisor take a long-term view of how best to protect the public trust resources and the needs of this County. This will require looking well past your individual tenures on the Board.

Conclusion:

Calaveras County does not have the leverage within the Forest Practice Act to substantially influence the content of timber harvest plans or timber operations within its borders. Since the mechanism exists for adopting County Rules, it makes complete sense to develop and present specific recommendations to the Forestry Board to incorporate Calaveras County-specific language into the Forest Practice Rules.

Respectfully submitted by:

Bruce Castle

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January 14, 2002

Attachments:

- * [Aerial photo of the lower end of USA Creek showing clear cut Units 18-23 and 63; and seed tree seed step Unit 5](#)
- * [Aerial photo of the mid-section of USA Creek showing clear cut Units 30-33, 36-38, and 40](#)

- * [Ground photo showing clear-cut Unit 33](#)
- * [Ground photo showing selective cut \(or seed tree seed step\) Unit 7.](#)