

Union Democrat -- SPI's latest log plans protested

by Katy Brandenburg
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The Ebbetts Pass Forest Watch is taking a stand against Sierra Pacific Industries' plans to heavily log more than 1,700 acres in northeastern Calaveras County.

Group members say documents filed with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection show Sierra Pacific intends to clear-cut more than two-thirds of the 74,000 acres it owns in Calaveras County over the next 80 years.

The most recent timber harvest application Sierra Pacific filed with CDF details 231 acres of proposed clear-cutting and 1,275 acres of commercial thinning, with another 262 acres subject to other selective methods of tree removal. The varying logging would cover a total of 1,768 acres. The acreage is on the north fork of the Mokleumne River, northeast of West Point, near Salt Springs Road. About 100 acres cross over into Amador County.

Sierra Pacific first submitted plans to log the site in October 2006, but the state forestry department returned them because some information was missing or unclear, said Steve Hollett, CDF unit forester for Calaveras and Tuolumne counties. The Redding-based logging company re-submitted plans March 13, and a pre-harvest inspection is slated for later this month, Hollett said.

"It's been pretty controversial because it's a big cut," he said. "A big cut ... And it's our job to make sure they do it without harming the environment."

Experts from many different organizations and fields, such as geologists, engineers, archaeologists, water quality officials and Department of Fish and Game representatives will be asked to join the

evaluation, he said.

A protest Ebbetts Pass Forest Watch members held Friday in Arnold against SPI's new timber plan also coincided with the start of a public campaign launched against Sierra Pacific by Forest Ethics, an international nonprofit group that has successfully campaigned against corporations like Home Depot and Victoria's Secret for supporting products or practices that endanger old-growth forests.

National focus on Sierra Nevada logging stems in part from the attention Ebbetts Pass Forest Watch has drawn with its past protests against Sierra Pacific's past clear-cuts in Calaveras County. The Arnold-based watchdog organization formed in 2000 in response to the timber giant's plans to log about 1,000 acres near Calaveras Big Trees State Park. The group challenged the plans, filed a lawsuit against Sierra Pacific and, several appeals later, the case is due to be heard by the California Supreme Court this spring.

"We just didn't go away," said Forest Watch member Addie Jacobson. "We don't feel that clear-cutting is sustainable. The timber industry talks about sustainability as cutting all the trees and replanting in 80 years, but we're talking about more than sustaining the industry."

Clear-cutting releases pesticides into the land and water, increases fire and erosion risks, and destroys wildlife habitat, group members say. Ebbetts Pass Forest Watch and Forest Ethics members say they hope to pressure the logging company to use more responsible, alternative methods of timber harvest by asking the building community to boycott Sierra Pacific wood.

Another local natural resources group, however, does not oppose clear-cutting done within approved state guidelines. TuCARE — Tuolumne County Alliance for Resources and the Environment — views this form of logging as just one of many methods of land management that forest owners are allowed to use, said group Executive Director Melinda Fleming.

Fleming said she is not familiar with SPI's new timber plan for its northeast Calaveras County property.

But "if it is acceptable under the California forest practice rules, we can support that," she said. "Clear-cutting gets to be an emotional issue... people look at it as trees being hurt, but whereas tree farmers look at it as a crop."

Private forest owners interested in trees as a crop aren't going to let erosion wash nutrients out of the soil, because the next crop of trees wouldn't be as healthy, or profitable, she said.

"In a way private forest owners are better stewards of land than in the national forests, where we don't have the funds to conscientiously manage every acre of land," Fleming said.

According to Jacobson, organizations opposing a specific timber plan are limited in what they can do. If an environmental group files comments against a logging plan and CDF approves it anyway, the only recourse the group has is litigation, she said.

"We're not looking for money. We're in court because this was the only appeal method given to us," she said.

Members of Ebbetts Pass Forest Watch have made appointments to meet Tuesday with at least 30 legislators in Sacramento to present what they say Sierra Pacific doesn't present at its "education days" about its logging activities.

"Just because they own the land doesn't mean they can do absolutely whatever they want with it," she said. "It's important for citizens to take time out of their lives and let the legislature know what's going on — the industry has paid people to do that."

Timber protest targets California company

Forestry leader calls "baseless scare tactics" insulting to public

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SACRAMENTO - Chainsaw-wielding anti-timber activists in hockey masks demonstrated on the grounds of the State Capitol today protesting the logging practices of one of California's leading timber companies.

Supporters of ForestEthics, an activist group with roots in Canada, derided Sierra Pacific Industries as the single largest threat to timberlands in the Sierra Nevada. Casey Harrell, director of ForestEthics' Sierra Campaign, claimed SPI has clear-cut thousands of acres of public and private land in the Sierras, and has plans to clearcut a million more acres of forest.

"We're looking to have an identification of where are the endangered forests left in Sierras and in the southern Cascades where Sierra Pacific has significant holdings. Let's protect them before they are gone," Harrell said. "They (SPI) believe the sole purpose of the land that they own in the Sierra is to be a timber resource for them. We fundamentally feel that there are other uses for the forest besides a timber resource to be sold. There are ecological values that either have equal or in certain cases a higher priority to the public at large than just looking at a forest as a timber resource."

The organization's protest Friday resembled a casting call for a Friday the 13th movie sequel with two ForestEthics supporters carrying chainsaws and wearing hockey masks. They and three other activists protested outside an SPI Window retail store in Fair Oaks, east of Sacramento Friday morning. Later, they appeared at the corner of Capitol Park to hand out campaign materials to passersby.

Mark Pawlicki, director of governmental affairs for SPI, defended his company's practices in a telephone interview. He said activists fail to mention that the company's harvest management plan spans decades.



ForestEthics supporter Peter Elias of Nevada County protests outside a Sierra Pacific Industries retail window store in Fair Oaks Friday. Elias, outfitted in a hockey mask and chainsaw, joined several other protesters in criticizing SPI's harvest practices as a threat to timberlands in the Sierras. An SPI spokesman said the company, which has major holdings in the Sierra, uses sustainable timber management practices.

"It is over 100 years. They fail to tell anybody that fact. We are managing all of our lands, so over a period of 100 years, you manage all of it," Pawlicki said. "You have to understand that you can't cut any more than you grow. We operate under that principle."

Pawlicki said timberlands managed by SPI are sometimes clearcut, but the practice can help the health of forests.

"A lot of lands we have we bought from folks who did a very poor job of managing them. We now have to clean them up and in some cases, all you can do is clear-cut," he said. "That is also a way we get the best re-generation. But keep in mind, we are talking about a 100-year plan."

Pawlicki said with the recent bankruptcy filing by Pacific Lumber Company, anti-logging activists have shifted their sights to SPI, a Redding-based company owned by Red Emmerson. Emmerson's company manages about 1.5 million acres of forestlands in the state. Pawlicki said SPI's harvest plans conform to strict state regulations.

"The law here is very stringent in California. There is no other state that has these restrictions like we do," he said. "Our plans are approved by the state. They are reviewed by several different agencies --- water quality monitoring and it is a CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) process. All of that occurs every time there is harvesting and the public has the right to comment on these plans when they are being reviewed. Of course they (ForestEthics) don't do that. They do this kind of thing."

Dave Bischel, president of the California Forestry Association, said companies like SPI operate under strict environmental regulations and government oversight in providing wood products for consumers. In a statement, he had strong words for protesters.

"Baseless scare tactics using old stereotypes of the forest products industry are insulting to a public that deserves to hear the facts," Bischel said. "Although a very small percentage of SPI forestlands are planned for traditional clear-cutting, there are a few areas where forest experts have determined that it is in the best interests of environmental stewardship."

Bischel said actively, wise-managed forests help wildlife habitat, native trees and promote forest health. For every harvested tree, foresters plant about seven new ones, Bischel stated.

"If anti-logging activist organizations had the facts on their side they wouldn't need these kinds of alarmist antics that are generally used to increase their membership," he said.

ForestEthics, which has offices in Oregon and Canada, staged similar protests Friday in the Sierra foothills and in the San Francisco Bay Area.