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Forest Communiqué

The Voice of Forest Unlimited

Fall 2018

Wildfires and Trees

Dr. Chad Hanson, Director and Chief Ecologist of Earth Island Institute's John Muir Project and author of *The Ecological Importance of Mixed-Severity Fires*, spoke at Forest Unlimited's Summer Dinner Under the Redwoods. He made several relevant points regarding wildfires.

First, most of the homes that have burned, and communities at risk from wildland fire, are not in forests, but in grasslands, chaparral, and oak woodlands (e.g., Tubbs fire and Thomas fire of 2017), so focusing on forests misses the mark.

Second, the science is clear that the only effective way to protect homes from wildland fire is to help homeowners make their homes more fire-safe (fire-resistant roofing, rain gutter guards, and ember-proof exterior vents) and conduct annual defensible space work within 100 feet of homes (Syphard et al. 2014). When this is done, well over 95% of homes will survive wildland fire, even in high fire weather. Activities beyond 100 feet provide no additional benefit.

Moreover, defensible space is about removing lower limbs on large trees, and removing most small trees, shrubs, and grasses within 100 feet—it is not about removing large old trees, so that whole conversation is misplaced. Legislators continue to ignore true community protection and focus instead on enriching the logging industry.

Third, it is highly misleading for the logging industry and its political allies to say our forests are unnaturally dense. We currently have slightly more small trees but fewer medium and large trees than we had historically, and overall our forests have "less" biomass now, not more (McIntyre et al. 2015).

Fourth, forests with more dead trees do not burn more intensely--this is a myth which has been debunked by scientists over and over (Hart et al. 2015, Meigs et al. 2016). Our findings were recently verified by Zald and Dunn (2018), who also found that forest density is a "poor predictor" of fire intensity, which is driven overwhelmingly by weather and climate. Fifth, the claim that increased logging somehow leads to lower fire intensity or rate of spread is pure logging industry misinformation.

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Dogwood Wins Again!

A Sonoma County Court once again has ruled in favor of Friends of the Gualala River (FoGR) in its lawsuit against CAL FIRE's approval of logging of coastal floodplain redwood forest in hundreds of acres of the Wild and Scenic Gualala River. The controversial "Dogwood" timber harvest plan (THP) proposed by Gualala Redwoods Timber LLC (GRT) has been opposed by public protests, petitions, and litigation since 2015.

On October 16, 2018, the court concluded that the second Dogwood THP failed to meet California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requirements for evaluating project alternatives with less environmental impact, and for assessing cumulative environmental impacts to the river, forest and floodplain, in addition to those from the Dogwood THP itself.

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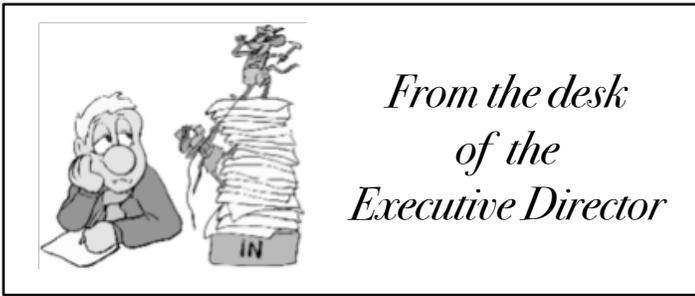
Victory for Felta Creek!

Logging of the hills along Felta Creek west of Healdsburg was approved by CalFire. However, on August 20, following a court hearing, the court agreed with Friends of Felta Creek's claims: there was insufficient analysis of impacts from traffic, inadequate study of bridges over the creek and (most importantly) potential harm to salmonids.

This is not the end of it because the owner may try amending the plan by fixing its deficiencies and resubmitting it. Or he could appeal the decision in court. Or he might continue marketing the land.

The best solution for this biologically significant creek that provides rare year round habitat for endangered coho and threatened steelhead trout is that it be preserved. The folks who challenged the logging plan are busy working to protect the whole watershed. "We remain committed to protecting the health of the fish and the forests," explained Quincey and Dan Imhoff who have been instrumental in

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What? Senate Bill 901 passes!

In elementary school, I was taught a simple fact about fire. For a fire to burn requires three things: fuel, air and a source of ignition.

Climate change has provided more fuel. Drought is now more common making forests drier. Warmer winters means that bark beetles no longer die in the winter increasing beetle infestation which kills conifers. Climate change is also shifting ecosystems northward. Consequently our forest convert to more brush and chaparral which burn better than conifers.

Climate change produces higher winds making more oxygen available to a fire in a shorter period of time. We saw this in the Tubbs fire in Santa Rosa when ferocious winds drove the fire to unmanageable proportions.

It is well known that climate change is driven by the burning of fossil fuels which produces carbon dioxide. It is also well known that forests absorb and lock down carbon dioxide. Rather than dealing with fossil fuel burning and deforestation, California's legislature and Governor have used the fire crisis to stampede passage of SB 901 which will actually make climate change worse and do little to prevent wildfire.

SB 901 creates yet another exemption from the prior review of logging under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Logging companies want to maximize the cut and cut more often. Developers want to continue sprawl development into "Urban Wildland Interface". They both hate disclosing the environmental effects of their projects as required by the CEQA. CEQA has been used by the public to force changes in projects to protect the environment. It has allowed Forest Unlimited to expose and halt illegal behavior by the California Department of Forestry.

SB 901 circumvents CEQA review with exemptions for logging disguised as "fuel reduction". There are already exemptions to protect structures from fire. There were rules for how the logging may be done that apply to exemptions but prior review of this exempt logging is no longer required. Couple that with Cal Fire's

unwillingness to actually enforce the rules and the result is the removal of large fire-resistant, shade producing conifers while leaving behind more slash, more brush and a drier micro climate. Less water percolates to the aquifer. Forest Unlimited has received many reports of this illegal behavior but, thanks to SB 901, we have few legal tools to deal with the problem. We report violations to an unresponsive Department of Forestry.

In addition to deforestation, SB 901 allows road building without the usual review and no longer requires foresters to describe how they will deal with erosion and sediment to the creeks.

So SB 901 actually could increase effects from climate change by the substantial amount of fuel that will be generated by widespread "thinning" operations, much of which may be unnecessary (see Wildfires and Trees article). Yet it does nothing to remove a major source of ignition: PG&E overhead power lines. Instead the legislature and the Governor have sought to shield PG&E from liability and have refused to consider requiring PG&E to place power lines underground safely out of harm's way.

SB 901 unleashes PG&E to further butcher the forest to "protect" power lines from falling trees, a fool's errand if there ever was one.

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www.forestunlimited.org

Forest Unlimited is a 501 (c)(3) organization whose purpose is to protect, enhance, and restore forests and watersheds.

Forest Unlimited educates the public about logging plan review, forestry law, and regulation.

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Wildfires Cont'd from p. 1

My colleagues and I recently published by far the largest analysis ever of this question (three decades of fire data across many millions of acres of forest) and found, unequivocally, that reduced environmental protections and increased logging results in "higher", not lower, fire intensity (Bradley et al. 2016).

And, finally, the claims of the logging industry and its political allies that the large 2018 fires are the result of a lack of logging does not pass the laugh test. The forests, including federal forests, in the three big 2018 California fires--Ferguson, Carr, and Mendocino Complex--have been extensively subjected to clearcutting, intensive mechanical "thinning" logging, and post-fire logging, and many of the areas where the fires swept through fastest had relatively few trees as a result, and were mostly dominated by shrubs, grasses, and old logging slash debris (this can be easily seen with Google Earth, zooming in to the pre-fire imagery in these fire areas).

If the California legislature pursues this approach of logging, which the California environmental community strongly opposes, it will not merely damage vast swaths of forest, but will also increase fire spread and intensity near communities, and divert scarce resources and attention away from the defensible space zone around homes, which is the only place of relevance to home protection.

This will lead to more losses of homes and lives next year and beyond, when it could be avoided.

Chad Hanson, Ph.D.

SB 901 Cont'd from p. 2

Since the Tubbs fire, PG&E has had two incidents in Sonoma County involving power lines: one where a heavy bird caused two lines to touch, igniting the bird which fell to the ground in flames starting a grass fire near forestland. Fortunately a fire truck just happened to be driving by and spotted the fire. Quick action by the local fire department contained the fire. The second incident involved sparking power lines downed by wind. Neither of these incidents were caused by trees.

We have long known that the California Department of Forestry (AKA Cal Fire) is dominated by the timber industry. The department works for the private interests of logging companies, not the public interest. The same seems to be true of the legislature and the Governor. The result is SB 901.

Until we remove private money from elections, corporations and the super-wealthy will continue to buy the politicians.

Tree Loss Report Completed

Forest Unlimited just released a report on tree losses in Sonoma County called, ***Ground Truth***.

When Forest Unlimited attempted to determine the amount and cause of tree losses in the county records where they existed at all, they were in different offices and in scattered files. In short, no one knew what was being lost on a monthly or yearly basis.

With a small grant from the Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment and technical assistance from biologists and GIS experts from the Hopland Research Station, Forest Unlimited set out to find out what was really going on.

The data sets are available, but it takes time, a small amount of funds, and interest to put the data to meaningful use. It goes without saying that much more work needs to be done, and we would expect the public agencies in charge of planning development, in charge of recovering the numerous listed species in the county facing extinction, and approving land use would do a better job tracking the overall or cumulative losses. Without this information, our watersheds will continue to decline. Professional planners know how to do better, however, they need leadership.

The local politicians need to direct staff to track and report on the tree removals requested and approved in all economic sectors and industries.

There appears to be a rise in applications to permanently remove trees from our watersheds, but no one, although requested to do so, is officially tracking the numbers. Forest Unlimited has, of course, a keen interest in tree losses. Its members work very hard to plant thousands of trees.

Findings:

Between 2007 and 2013, approximately 950-acres of trees were permanently converted to other uses in Sonoma County. Of those 950-acres, CalFire approved approximately 188-acres of these conversions. These are the findings of report just completed entitled,

The other approximately 762-acres of forest conversion and woodlands were approved by cities and the County or were otherwise unauthorized.

Forest Unlimited has started a petition of support for a tree ordinance to actually start protecting mature native trees in Sonoma County from destruction. Please go online at www.forestunlimited.org to "Forest News."

Tree Planting 2019

It's that time of year again! Please join us in our efforts to reforest Sonoma County forests and help us to achieve our mission to protect, enhance, and restore our forests and watersheds in our 22nd annual tree planting event.

On Saturday, January 5th and Sunday, January 6th first time volunteers and valued volunteers from past years will be planting redwood seedlings at Wildwood Conservation Foundation in Guerneville. Previous volunteers will have the chance to see growing redwoods that were planted at the 2011 and 2015 tree planting events.



Invitations will be sent out to previous volunteers, and if you would like to participate in this tree planting event, please contact **Harlie** at harlierankin@gmail.com and she will send you the RSVP form.

Lunch and necessary tree planting equipment will be provided. You don't want to miss this! Forest Unlimited has been planting trees for 21 years. We now are planting about 1400 redwood seedlings per year. Plant a seedling and watch it grow. Come join us!



Note: You can see more amazing photos from our 2018 tree planting on our website: www.forestunlimited.org

Cal Fire Logging Exemptions

Forest Unlimited has received information about areas in Sonoma County where logging without Timber Harvest Plans are occurring. After doing some investigating online and after a discussion with a Cal Fire forester, we found there are a number of new exemptions for logging. What is puzzling and concerning is not just how many ways there are to circumvent the Forest Practice Act, but that the very trees that can resist fire and disease, **redwood trees**, are included in the taking in most if not all of these exemptions.

Until better rules and oversight get in place, Forest Unlimited hopes that landowners will realize the value of mature trees in their grove or forest, especially redwood trees, long lived and fire resistant, and not be tempted to cash them in.

Note the exemption for PG&E, a private utility, that was discussed in the SB 901 article.

LOGGING EXEMPTIONS

1. Public Agency, Public and Private Utility Right of Way Exemption
2. Forest Fire Prevention Pilot Project
3. Forest Fire Prevention Project Exemption
4. Notice of Emergency Timber Operations
5. Notice of Emergency Timber Operations Fuel Hazard Reduction
6. Structure Protection Exemption
7. Post-Fire Recovery Exemption
8. Drought Mortality Exemption: Harvesting Dead or Dying Trees, Fuelwood or Split Products Related to Drought 14 CCR § 1038(k)
9. Christmas Tree; Dead, Dying or Diseased Fuelwood or Split Products Exemption
10. Oak Woodland Management Exemption
11. Less Than 3 acre Conversion Exemption
12. Substantially Damaged Timberland Unmerchantable Sawlog Exemption

"I'm the Lorax who speaks for the trees which you seem to be chopping as fast as you please...But I'm also in charge of the Brown Bar-ba-loots who played in the shade in their Bar-ba-loot suits and happily lived, eating Trufula Fruits..."

Dogwood 2 *Cont'd from p. 1*

FoGR, Forest Unlimited, and California Native Plant Society previously sued CAL FIRE over similar environmental review flaws in the first Dogwood THP, and prevailed requiring CAL FIRE to revoke the permit to log "Dogwood" in March, 2017. The applicant, GRT, resubmitted the logging plan with minimal corrections, and CAL FIRE again approved it over major public opposition. FoGR again sued over the same basic flaws in CAL FIRE's review process for "Dogwood II".

In agreement with legal precedents, the Court stated in "Dogwood II" that it is "absolutely clear" that THPs must be functionally equivalent to Environmental Impact Reports (EIRs). THPs must meet the same fundamental standards of CEQA with regard to evaluation of alternatives that reduce impacts to the environment, which the Court reaffirmed is "one of the most important functions of an EIR." The Court ruled that CAL FIRE's position on THP requirements for alternatives analysis was incorrect, and its discussion of alternatives for Dogwood simply presented no information, analysis, or explanation of how it reached its conclusions in rejecting all alternatives as infeasible. FoGR argued that CAL FIRE uncritically accepted the prejudicial arguments of the applicant, GRT, in rejecting alternatives without analysis.

As in Dogwood I, the Court ruled that CAL FIRE failed to assess cumulative environmental impacts to the Gualala River and its watershed in accordance with requirements of CEQA. The basic flaw in CAL FIRE's analysis was a lack of a reasoned discussion for the basis of its conclusions.

FoGR is seeking reform of CAL FIRE's THP procedures and documents so that they actually function as efficient equivalents of CEQA Environmental Impact Reports that focus on significant environmental impacts and solutions in the public interest, not just private interests of the timber industry applicants. FoGR and its broad coalition of public citizens and organizations will continue to pursue conservation of the unique Gualala Redwood Floodplain Forest, including full consideration of alternatives that protect the most sensitive extensive wetland and floodplain habitats.

"The Gualala River is the only river in Sonoma and Mendocino Counties that has unprotected, mature redwood floodplain forests. The river needs its floodplain protected. GRT owns almost 30,000 acres of timberland in the Gualala River watershed. The floodplain forest in "Dogwood" is less than 400 acres and deserves to be protected from harm."

--Jeanne Jackson, FoGR

For more information, visit <http://gualalariver.org/>

Felta Creek *Cont'd from p. 1*

preventing the logging in the headwaters.

Thank you to all who have taken the time to learn about this effort, this rare remaining habitat, and for writing letters. Felta Creek is a last important stronghold for the wild coho salmon.

Interested conservation groups or individuals should contact Friends of Felta Creek (Lucy Kotter <friendsoffeltacreek@gmail.com>). Or you can send donations for the effort to **Friends of Felta Creek c/o Forest Unlimited, PO Box 506, Forestville CA.**

Lorax Voices Public's Concern

"NOW... thanks to your hacking my trees to the ground, there's not enough Truffula Fruit to go 'round. And my poor Bar-ba-loots are all getting the crummies because they have gas, and no food, in their tummies!"

The clear positive message of Dr. Seuss is that those in charge of the "Bar-ba-loots" so to speak, must stand up for the trees and the environmental health of the community BEFORE it's too late.

In the absence of any Lorax in leadership, Forest Unlimited and its members call on the County to put aside the large exemptions it carries on its books that allow large scale and on-going tree removal activities. For example:

"Agricultural uses exempt from the tree protection ordinance are as follows: ...wineries and agricultural cultivation..." (Sonoma County Code, Section 26-88-010)

As reported before, after much effort on the part of the public, the update of the Tree Ordinance was made a part of the County's official work plan; but it has now been removed.

Forest Unlimited is planting thousands of trees (see article herein), and fighting to save our mature trees wherever they are threatened, and refuses to stand by as acres of oaks and diverse tree habitats are cleared away with no end in sight.

Your love of this diverse county demands an audience. Visit our website and download our petition that urges the Board of Supervisors to update our tree protection policies. **Send your signatures to PO box 506 Forestville 95436.** Forest Unlimited will collect the petitions and present your earnest request to the Supervisors. If we all get at least ten signatures, that will help to get the Supervisors to do the right thing.

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Save the Date: Redwood Tree Planting on Jan. 5 & 6, Sat. & Sun.

Sign up for eScripts! at Olivers Market in Santa Rosa and Cotati, Fircrest Market in Sebastopol, and Lucky markets. Ask them to direct donations to Forest Unlimited.

Or go to this link and sign up: <http://www.escrip.com/wheretoearn/merchantsearch.jsp>

Clip and mail back with your check in the envelope provided. Thank you!

Become a Member of Forest Unlimited

Your tax-deductible contribution will help fund forestry education programs and forest preservation, protection, and enhancement projects. Members receive newsletters and notification about special events, workshops and logging in their watersheds.

YES! I would like to join Forest Unlimited to further your work! (Dues are tax-deductible as permitted)

\$200 \$100 \$50 \$35 Other \$

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