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# A place to strut rather than cut

Conservation groups want to change state's approach to managing forests

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Jackson State Forest, Mendocino County — The recent approval of a logging plan for this lush redwood forest in the mountains northeast of the town of Mendocino has angered environmentalists,

who say it is time to consider alternative approaches for state-owned woodlands.

Specifically, conservationists want to see Jackson and other state forests managed for recreational use, watershed protection and wildlife rather than timber production.

Jackson is by far the biggest of the eight forests in the state forest system, which was founded in 1947. In total, the octet of forests comprises 75,000 acres; Jackson alone accounts for 50,000 acres.

Administered by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF), Jackson and its sister forests were founded to serve as “demonstration” forests — commercial woodlands where various approaches to logging could be tried, with “sustained yield” the goal.



Chronicle / Frederic Larson



The state manages Jackson State Forest's 50,000 acres to study different approaches to logging. Chronicle photo by Frederic Larson

Paul Hughes and Vince Taylor think state forests should be managed for conservation and recreation. Chronicle photo by Frederic Larson

In the parlance of commercial forestry, sustained yield refers to a kind of steady state of woody biomass: The forests grow enough timber to replace any that is cut.

State foresters say there is an acute need for research on various sustained yield scenarios. Jackson, they say, therefore, serves both the environment and the economy as a demonstration forest.

"Our programs address the needs of small timber industry landowners who don't have the scientific staffs to carry out the kind of large experimental projects we can do here," said John Griffen, the assistant forest manager for Jackson.

Jackson is hardly a virgin forest. Like most of the state's redwood land, it has been logged intermittently since about the middle of the 19th century. Only 459 of Jackson's acres support stands that have never been cut.

But the forest does have thousands of acres of 80- to 100-year-old redwoods.

And because redwoods grow extremely rapidly, these stands have begun to take on some of the characteristics of true old-growth groves.

That point was emphasized during a recent tour of Jackson conducted by Vince Taylor, the executive director of the Campaign to Restore Jackson State Redwood Forest, and Paul Hughes, the executive director of Forests Forever.

The two groups are plaintiffs in a lawsuit filed against the California Board of Forestry over its recent approval of a CDF logging plan for Jackson.

The board must approve all state land logging plans proposed by CDF.

## **FORESTS CAN LIVE AGAIN**

"This is a perfect example of the regeneration that's possible," said Taylor as he and Hughes strolled through a grove of stately redwoods near Camp Three, a public campground in the northern portion of the forest.

"This area was completely flattened about 80 years ago," Taylor said. "Now it really feels like a cathedral in here."

The shaggy-barked, russet trees were several feet in diameter and soared well over 100 feet into the sky. Soft green light filtered through the canopy, and ferns and sorrel grew in the rich litter on the forest floor.

"This parcel will be logged, under the CDF plan," said Taylor, "and we think that's disgraceful. Logging on the scale CDF wants to do here is an anachronism. This forest would

far better serve the local communities and the state if it were restored and managed for watershed, recreation, wildlife and fishery values.”

Hughes said CDF has a vested interest in encouraging logging in the forest, because the harvested timber generates about \$14 million a year for the state’s Forest Resource Improvement Fund, which supports various agency projects, such as reforestation and logging experiments.

A court-ordered moratorium on logging in Jackson has been in effect for two years, pending finalization of the long-range logging plan that CDF recently approved.

Under the CDF plan, Jackson would be divided into three categories.

About one-third of the forest would be subject to standard clear-cutting. Another third would be managed for “cluster selection,” meaning single trees or small groups of trees would be targeted.

The final third would be harvested through the “group selection” method, which could result in small clear-cuts one to five acres in size.



### **5,000 ACRES IN FIVE YEARS**

If the plan — which could govern timber harvests in the forest for a decade or more — is implemented as approved, up to 5,000 acres could be logged in the next five years.

“In the logged areas, we could expect to lose 30 to 40 percent of the canopy,” said Hughes. “That would greatly reduce the value of these areas as wildlife habitat. It would also encourage nonnative flora such as pampas grass and gorse, and would contribute to the siltation of rivers and creeks, threatening coho salmon and steelhead trout.”

Environmentalists say Californians overwhelmingly support managing Jackson for wildlife and recreation rather than timber. For evidence, they cite comments the state Board of Forestry received on the proposed CDF plan.

“The board got more than 4,000 comments opposing the plan and only 40 supporting it,” said Kathy Bailey, a north coast representative of the Sierra Club who specializes in timber issues.

The comments were so overwhelming in opposition, said Bailey, that the board put several

tough conditions on the plan before they approved it.

"Usually, the board is just a rubber stamp for CDF proposals," she said, "but they really slapped (CDF's) hand on this one. They required details on management plans for late seral growth (old-growth) stands, a more specific schedule for demonstration logging projects and more information on variable retention (clear-cut) plans."

The board also directed CDF to improve communication with local residents, said Bailey.

"CDF has run Jackson like a fiefdom, with no regard for the concerns of the people who live near the forest," she said.

## **NO BOARD OPPOSITION**

CDF and board of forestry officials don't see things quite the way Bailey does.

"Actually, the board was pleased with CDF's plan," said Dan Sendek, the executive officer for the board. "The four directives were issued because of the public comments, but any amendment to the (final) plan is going to be at CDF's discretion."

Sendek said the vast majority of the comments opposing the plan came as form letters or form e-mails from the main groups fighting logging in Jackson - - Forests Forever, the Campaign to Restore Jackson State Redwood Forest and the Dharma Cloud Foundation.

The board would have given more credence to the comments, said Sendek, if the sources had been more varied.

As to the revenues CDF receives from logging, Griffen said, "The annual average is more like \$10 million — \$14 million is at the high end."

Griffen rejected the notion that CDF is exploiting or degrading Jackson.

"The agency operates on laws passed by the state Legislature and regulations set by the board of forestry," he said. "That speaks to the motivation of individuals who work for CDF. I'd certainly hesitate to say that there is any institutional motivation to mismanage state forests."

The groups opposing the plan have filed a suit in Mendocino County Superior Court contending there has been insufficient research on the environmental impact of the proposed logging.

If that litigation fails, said Taylor, environmentalists will explore other avenues.

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