



Diggin' In: THE GIENGER REPORT

Redwood Forest Foundation

Please refer to my column in the Fall/Winter 2013 edition of *Forest & River News* for a summary of the daunting tasks facing the Redwood Forest Foundation, Inc. (RFFI). The non-profit organization, founded to acquire depleted timberlands and return them to health and benefit to local communities through community-based forestry, is in the midst of trying to establish the kind of stewardship consistent with its mission while attempting to retire its debt to Bank of America. The 65 million dollar loan made in 2007 for the approximately 50,000 acre Usal Redwood Forest in the Northwest corner of Mendocino County has two parts due to be paid back in 2028, and a third portion by 2071.

A series of unforeseen (of course) events, including the burst housing bubble, financial system breakdown, bond freeze, and delay and opposition in getting a conservation easement greatly increased the stress for RFFI to make the Usal Redwood Forest a successful vital model for community-based forests and forestry. The conservation easement, preventing

development of the forest, which was granted by the Wildlife Conservation Board, and the sale of coastal land to the Save-the-Redwoods League on the South side of Usal Creek produced over 20 million dollars that was used to pay interest on the 2007 loan. The conservation easement had some other provisions including an annual cap of 2.9% on the percent of conifer inventory that can be cut over a rolling ten year period, and a management plan certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). The deadline for this certification is May 2015.

One of the conditions for RFFI getting the loan from Bank of America was the hiring of a professional management organization. The organization turned out to be Campbell Timber Management (CTM), which had many employees with many years of experience in the area of the Usal Redwood Forest under previous owners. CTM has been very earnest in adapting to the RFFI style of forestry, but the half-dozen or so selection forestry Timber Harvest Plans that have been able to be submitted, approved, and operated on have essentially exhausted the areas in

the forest that were old enough and high-quality enough to be viable under pure selection systems. The problem(s): How to do “restoration forestry” that brings back high quality trees and forest, reduces the high percentage of tanoaks from decades of mismanagement, pays the debt, and is consistent with stewardship and community values.

You are a vital part of helping to understand and solve these difficult problems. The public planning process for FSC certification will be starting in the next few months. Check the rffi.org website for information in general, and the details and opportunities of the FSC certification process. Again, please get informed and participate!

Usal Redwood Forest Restoration

Restoration continues in the Usal Redwood Forest. Work on the Coho Recovery Plan for the South Fork Eel River tributaries is underway—and will include the remarkable detailed forest and terrain information from lidar flights (LIDAR—Light Detection and Ranging—is a remote sensing method used to examine the surface of the Earth) made recently. The road inventory for the Indian Creek watershed is being wrapped up, and similar additional Indian Creek inventories for the new neighbors in the Indian Creek watershed, the Lost Coast Redwood and Salmon Initiative, are being planned for. Two large wood placement projects were approved and funded recently under the Department of Fish and Wildlife’s (CDFW) Fisheries Restoration Grant Program (FRGP)—one in Anderson Creek (major tributary of Indian Creek), and one in the South Fork Usal Creek. Phase V for Standley Creek



Northern Spotted Owl tour in the Usal Redwood Forest showing large Redwood stump and post-multiple cuttings depleted forest.



Mattole River looking upstream at CR 435 bridge (Mendo County) on March 1, 2014, after February rains. Good news for steelhead. Mid November flows were too low for Chinook and coho salmon spawning migration. ALL PHOTOS BY RICHARD GIENGER



depending on how big a crowd is expected. The first Restoration Workshop will feature Allan Renger and Sean Gallagher of CDFW presenting the results of their spawning population survey work (approximately 5 to 10 years) in both the Eel River watershed and the Mendocino Coast—then focusing in on the Usal Redwood Forest. This is a ‘big deal’—CDFW is pretty tight with their data. Also, featured on April 23rd will be the Mattole River Baker Creek Project with Tasha McKee, Sam Flanagan, Campbell Thompson, and crew. Another ‘big deal’: raising the water table and creating accessible off-channel habitat for coho and steelhead, maybe even benefiting the Chinook that might make it into Baker Creek. Again, check RFFI’s website for information.

Now, for some Politics

Well, I’m going to have to change gears here and plunge into some unpleasant aspects of forest and watershed politics in California. The following is a draft written to increase awareness and action to “get-the-show-on-the-road” to actually deal with reform of the cumulative impact evaluation and response process, integrate recovery in the timber harvest plan process, and begin sensible, simple and doable monitoring. You should also know that regulations affecting Working Forest Management Plans are now being contended at the Board of Forestry.

restoration work was also approved and funded under that program.

New proposals that have been submitted include water table monitoring in lower Usal Creek (hopefully a precursor to taking action to prevent loss of coho and steelhead fry and smolts in the lower sections of Usal Creek that dry up). The Usal Creek water table monitoring proposal went to the Mendocino Fish and Game Commission. A proposal for a Usal Creek Coho Recovery Plan and one for Phase VI for Standley Creek (the last planned phase) are going into the FRGP on March 17th.

The contract with the Cahto Tribe for restoration and use of the Chinquapin Springs Tan Oak Grove has been reworked for multiple years. A large get-together with local and regional tribes sponsored by Cahto with RFFI participation is scheduled for Harwood Hall in Laytonville on April 28th. A number of issues will

be discussed, including management planning, partnerships, advisory and consultation protocols, and the Usal beach and campground.

Speaking of Usal Beach—the November meeting described in the last issue regarding problems at Usal Beach and camping areas has been followed by another meeting in February. On May 3rd at the Peg House/Standish-Hickey/Leggett there will be a broad-based and BBQ social to discuss important issues for the entire “Lost Coast” as well as the specific issues about Usal. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Parks & Rec, RFFI, and others will have information tables/displays etc. Get in touch with District Director Tom Gunther in Eureka or Weott for more information. Set up an info table on May 3rd for your organization.

Oh, and RFFI is starting off a series of Restoration Workshops, the first on April 23rd with the venue still to be set—

*Introduction for E-mails Addressing
the Overdue Policy Changes Needed
in California Forest Practices*

To make a long story short—and it is a very long story—the Forest Practice/Timber Harvest Plan process has never adequately responded to cumulative effects and the need for restoration, monitoring, and quality assurances for either timber or wildlife. The regulations, of course, are far better in many regards than the essentially regulation-free era of the 1950s and 60s—but, effective actions are not being taken to address the extreme forest depletion (that extends to the present day and will continue into the future); the needs of state and federal listed salmonids and other wildlife species; and, the continuing ‘legacy impacts’ such as extremely compromised riparian habitat and hydrological damage (erosion and sedimentation) from tractor logging.

A couple of years ago now, AB 1492 became law, which, among other things removed all fees for logging plans and replaced those fees with tax revenues paid by the public for retail timber products. This revenue is supposed to not only pay for the regulatory process, but also to pay for some significant restoration work through grant programs related to as well as independent of forestry regulation. Policy changes that integrate restoration/recovery in the regulatory process are imperative. One of the major ‘rubs’ of AB 1492 is its intent to determine efficiencies and adequate ecological performance and the way that industry and the Board of Forestry and CalFire immediately acted to constrain/prevent adequate policy shifts to address those intents of AB 1492.

Instead of using ground-based, multistakeholder, multidisciplinary pilot projects that would actually look at and determine the basic information needs and necessary actions for addressing efficiencies and ecological performance—



Extreme legacy damage in the Juan Creek watershed from 1977, after the 1973 Forest Practice Act. The proposed Pilot Projects would start to comprehensively address and correct this kind of watershed damage.

notably the decades-long failure to adequately address cumulative impacts, restoration needs, and simple doable monitoring protocols—the same old dominating timber interests are trying to shoe-horn an industry ‘dream-team’ committee envisioned by them in 2005 to be THE VENUE for meeting the intents of AB 1492. This “Effectiveness Monitoring Committee,” described by an industry representation on the Board of Forestry as “scientists-in-a-sandbox” WILL NOT EVALUATE AND MAKE THE POLICY CHANGES WHICH ARE NECESSARY. Their so-called charter does not address the needs described above, and is honed to address very limited ‘scientific questions’ within a group selected for ‘consensus ability and industry experience.’

You need to let the politicians and administrators know, at every level, that this industry-tilted EMC perversion is unacceptable. Real on-the-ground, multistakeholder, and multidisciplinary pilot projects that are Planning Watershed-based need to start as soon as possible—with goals tuned into the intent of AB 1492, with set time

constraints, public participation, and transparency. Blue-prints to achieve this have been around since at least 2001. The public is now footing the bill for the forestry regulation process, and must have adequate policy changes to correct decades-long deficiencies and inefficiencies in forest practices in California (documented by multiple blue-ribbon committees and studies).

🌲 **If you and/or your organization can help and want to get informed about what needs to be done, please get in touch with the me. Your participation is very important! Right Now.**

Since arriving in the Mattole Valley of Humboldt County in 1971, Richard Gienger has immersed himself in homesteading, forest activism, and watershed restoration. Richard’s column covers a range of issues including fisheries and watershed restoration and forestry, plus describes opportunities for the public to make positive contributions in the administrative and legislative arenas as well as in their own backyards.