



PRESS RELEASE

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GUERNEVILLE FOREST COALITION FILES LAWSUIT TO STOP LOGGING

- Neighborhood group takes legal action to save Redwoods and Douglas Firs -

Guerneville, CA: A neighborhood group in Guerneville - the Guerneville Forest Coalition (GFC) - has filed a lawsuit to stop the logging of 224 acres of Redwoods and Douglas Firs along the Russian River. This follows approval of the Silver Estates Timber Harvest Plan on November 17 by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Prevention (Cal Fire).

The GFC asserts that Cal Fire has failed to properly analyze and mitigate the significant adverse environmental impacts associated with the timber harvest plan (THP). It also claims that, in approving the plan, Cal Fire has failed to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the 1973 Forest Practice Act.

GFC member and local resident, John Dunlap, said: "Cal Fire claims that the plan has addressed concerns raised by the public and Sonoma County. This is not the case. In its official response to over 400 public comments, Cal Fire has merely cut and pasted sections from the THP. It remains a bad logging plan in a terrible location. It risks irreparable harm to the Russian River and surrounding wildlife while putting the local community at increased risk of wildfire and landslides. In approving this plan, Cal Fire has failed in its duty to protect the public."

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In addition to the 420 public comments raising concerns about the logging plan, Sonoma County has also raised objections. In a January 2021 letter to Cal Fire, Director of Transportation and Public Works, Johannes Hoevertsz, wrote: "The County is concerned that in its current form the Silver Estates THP does not adequately mitigate all of the potentially significant impacts of the proposed timber operations, and we believe that perhaps the THP review team did not understand the County's request or the scope of Cal Fire's authority to address off-site impacts through the THP process." Cal Fire has failed to address specifically the County's concerns in the Official Response, stating that "the mitigations included in the approved THP are appropriate."

The area to be logged is only half a mile from downtown Guerneville, between Neeley Road, Mays Canyon Road, the Russian River, and the Bohemian Grove. Residents are concerned that the removal of large fire-resistant Redwoods and Douglas Firs will encourage the growth of highly flammable brush species and dry out the forest floor. They also fear it will lead to more unstable soils in an area renowned for landslides.. This is of most concern to residents of Neeley Road, who have only one way in and out of the area for most of the year.

The GFC also claims that the forester and Cal Fire failed to conduct a thorough assessment of the visual impact of the logging along the Highway 116 Scenic Corridor. The THP states that 60 per cent of the logging area is visible from the scenic highway. The GFC notes that Cal Fire has approved the plan despite knowing that an independent visual assessment is currently being conducted by the GFC with money provided by the Sonoma County Tourism Impact Fund.

Residents and environmentalists are also concerned about the historic 2,000 year old Clar redwood tree. The tallest tree in Sonoma county, the 340 feet tree is not slated for logging but biologists fear that a proposed 75 feet buffer zone around the tree is insufficient to protect it. Redwood expert and UC Berkeley professor, Todd Dawson, has said that the protected zone should be larger around such a massive tree: "It is not just about protecting the tree itself but a piece of the ecosystem that it both requires and helps create."

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The landowners behind the Silver Estates Timber Harvest Plan, the Roger and Michelle Burch Revocable Family Trust, and their company, Redwood Empire, have been involved in a number of environmental lawsuits, including a five-year battle to log in the Gualala River floodplain.

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