

River timber plan sneaks through

'They're going to cut a lot of trees'

BY GREG KING

Louisiana-Pacific Corporation soon will harvest redwood trees from a 74-acre grove, one of the last large stands on the Russian River.

The second-growth grove lies just below the Guerneville sewage treatment plant, about 200 yards down-river from the end of Neeley Road. The California Division of Forestry approved the plan last Oct. 9 with little public notice and after receiving no public input. The Sonoma County Planning Department inspected the site and determined that the harvest would have no negative visual impact from Highway 116, across The River, and therefore made no recommendations for alteration of the Timber Harvest Plan (THP).

L-P designed the THP so that they would not legally have to notify the people living or owning land at the end of Neeley Road, according to L-P spokesman Ken Wood. California law requires that people owning property within 300 feet of a proposed logging operation be notified prior to approval.

"The plan was specifically drawn to exclude problems with the adjacent landowners," Wood told The Paper this week. "We didn't want the problem of going right up against them." Wood said logging operations could begin within a month.

There are three landowners within 300 feet of the site: the Bohemian Club, the Russian River Sanitation District and Robert Burnip. Burnip lives in San Francisco but his father, Sid, lives on his Neeley road property. Sid Burnip,

referring to a portion of the property that L-P logged previously, said that "if they proceed as they did before," he sees no problem with the current harvest plan.

The THP for the grove encompasses three harvest methods, each applying to different sections of the site: shelterwood, removal cut; shelterwood, seed cut; and shelterwood, preparatory cut. The removal cut, called a "mercenary log" in the trade, harvests most trees with 16-inch or larger diameters. Harvesters utilizing the preparatory cut take 50 percent of the trees on the site. A seed cut refers to the "seed" trees that must be left, according to this designation: 10 trees per acre of 18-inch or greater diameter, or five trees per acre with diameters 24 inches or greater.

The Silver Estate, as the grove is called, is perhaps the largest remaining stand of redwood on the banks of the Russian River. Its 74 acres dwarfs Dubrava's 16.4 acres and is about three times as large as the privately-owned grove just west of Monte Rio on Highway 116. Northwest Golf Course is under 50 acres.

Local environmentalists were surprised when informed of the harvest plan; most have not even seen the grove.

Local tree surgeon Darrell Sukovitzin said this week that, "I have no problem with logging" as long as "sound forest practice" is used. He said that leaving only 10 trees per acre is "an insult...a devastation of the land." Sukovitzin said that "the Department of Forestry does not always use sound forest



AWESOME — A grove or redwood deck.

THE PAPER/KING

practice management."

Sonoma County has little or no say as to how loggers conduct their operations here. Two Planning Department representatives did visit the Silver Estates prior to approval, but only to survey the possible visual impact from Highway 116. "Our main concern at the time was (visual) impact from the scenic highway," said county planner Rich Lehtinen, who added that, "It's a difficult site to see from the highway." Travelers heading east on Highway 116 may see the grove by looking across The River just after the last Northwood turnoff.

Lehtinen said that L-P "didn't like us [the county] being out there [to inspect the site]. They obviously weren't very happy that anyone from the county was interested." Lehtinen said that while inspecting the site, he had the feeling that The River community would respond negatively to the harvest plan.

"There will be some impact," he said. "They're going to cut a lot of trees."

Because the harvest was approved over 30 days ago, opponents of the plan have little recourse to stop it. But Sebastopol environmental attorney Sharon Duggan said this week that a recent court ruling in Mendocino

County could aid local environmentalists in the future.

Duggan was instrumental in forcing Georgia-Pacific to refile a THP for harvesting virgin redwood trees from the Sally Bell grove inside the Sinkyone Wilderness. The state court ruling says that before logging a small portion of an area that already has been extensively logged, or which is under consideration to be logged, a forester must consider the "cumulative effect" such an isolated harvest plan will have on the region as a whole.

The L-P property surrounding the Silver Estate already has been extensively logged, with the grove by The River being one of the few sections of the property showing minimal harvesting over many years.

Chuck Joiner, inspector for the California Division of Forestry, says that the Silver Estate would not be affected by the Sally Grove decision because 74 acres is "not even a drop in the bucket" compared to the Russian River Basin as a whole. He said that "cumulative effect" could not be applied to the Estate because of its small size. The Sally Bell grove, however, is 75 acres.

For more on this story, see page A9