



FORESTS FOREVER

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Governor snubs forest protection this legislative year *Wild forest protection bill may still offer redemption*

Although he traded on a green platform in his 2003 campaign, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger was no friend of California's forests in 2005.

On Sept. 7, Schwarzenegger vetoed SB 744, a bill that would have enhanced public access to information about timber harvest plans by making them available online.

To replace a nominee for a seat on the California Board of Forestry who was unpopular with environmentalists, he nominated an even more unsuitable candidate.

A bill that would help protect California's dwindling roadless forests failed to reach his desk, though it may do so in early 2006. But resistance to the bill is already coming from the very cabinet-level agency charged with safeguarding the state's forest resources.

In his public statement on the veto of SB 744, the governor said the California Department of Forestry (CDF) "is working to improve the public's access to . . . timber harvest plans through a pilot internet access program." He went on to say that "the prescriptive nature of this bill could interfere with CDF's ability to test the practical aspects of converting documents to an electronic format and displaying them on the internet."

The only "prescription" the bill made, however, was to set a time limit on when this conversion would take place. It would have required the CDF to do what it claims it intends to do anyway.

"Greater access to public-domain records on logging projects is something the timber industry does not want," said Paul Hughes, executive director of Forests Forever. "We're very disappointed that the governor chose to heed his well-heeled industry backers rather than the elected representatives of all Californians."

Ron Nehring, vice-chairman of the California Republican Party, was appointed to the California Board of Forestry on July 12 by Schwarzenegger. "Nehring promises to bring a strong bias in favor of the timber industry," Hughes said. "He also lacks any actual forestry experience; his primary qualification for the job seems to be that his house came close to burning down in a forest fire in 2003."

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A Republican political activist since college, Nehring is a senior consultant for Americans for Tax Reform, the far-right group founded by anti-tax activist Grover Norquist (see: <http://www.atr.org/>). He was also director of development and public affairs for the National Center for Public Policy Research (<http://www.nationalcenter.org/>), a right-wing think tank that, among many other conservative causes, argues against taking action to stop global warming and against preserving roadless forests.

The nine-member Board of Forestry is appointed by the governor and is supposed to represent a range of interests. “Nehring’s appointment would tip the balance of the board yet further in favor of industry and away from sound forestry and citizen participation,” Hughes said.

AB 715, authored by Assemblyman Lloyd Levine (D-Van Nuys), would prevent state agencies and departments from assisting the federal government in any action not compatible with the original, protective 2001 federal Roadless Area Conservation Rule. The bill ran out of time in this session, however, and will not be voted on until legislative business resumes next year. One of its main opponents was the California Resources Agency.

“We value wild, roadless forests in this state,” Hughes said. “And we shouldn’t be forced to help in their destruction. If the federal government doesn’t want to protect roadless areas from logging and development, then California will have to step up. AB 715 will give us a place to start.”

There are 18 national forests in California; inventoried roadless areas within them cover about 4.4 million acres. It is these roadless areas that the recent Bush administration repeal of the 2001 roadless rule would leave vulnerable to logging, roadbuilding, and other kinds of development.

Schwarzenegger said back in November 2004 that he would not file a petition under the new Bush administration rule. He is seeking instead to negotiate a state-specific rule for California with the Forest Service. The governor has not yet indicated whether he will sign AB 715.

“We hope the governor will keep his promise to ‘keep California’s roadless areas roadless’ by signing this bill,” Hughes said. “Rather than listen to the timber industry and the industry-friendly officials in CDF and Resources, he should listen to the people of California.

“Californians who are concerned with preserving their wild forests– and that is most of us– should let the governor know how they feel.”

Forests Forever is a nonprofit group in San Francisco dedicated to protecting California’s forests.

The Forests Forever website has more information on the above topics.

For SB 744, see: <http://www.forestsforever.org/SB744veto.html>

For the Nehring nomination, see: <http://www.forestsforever.org/nehringalert.html>

For AB 715, see: <http://www.forestsforever.org/AB715timeout.html>