



FORESTS FOREVER

50 First St. Suite 401, San Francisco, California 94105

Phone: 415/974-3636 FAX: 415/974-3664

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Contact:

Paul Hughes, executive director: (415) 974-4201; paul@forestsforever.org
Marc Lecard, communications manager: (415) 974-4202; marc@forestsforever.org

Timber industry kills clearcutting-restriction bill

Advocates respond by calling for out-and-out ban

Clearcutting is making a mess of California's forests. And last week a bill that would have limited some of the worst excesses of clearcutting was killed in the state Assembly.

Forests Forever and its allies are now calling on the state's highest elected officials to ban clearcutting outright.

Forest-protection advocates were incensed when on Apr. 17 Assembly Bill 2926, a bill to limit clearcutting in California introduced by Assembly Speaker Pro Tem Sally Lieber (D-Mountain View) was killed in the Assembly Natural Resources Committee following a lobbying blitz by Big Timber. The bill garnered four "aye" votes, one short of the number needed for passage.

The measure would have restricted the maximum area of clearcuts to 10 acres. This limit would have been consistent with rules governing timberlands in the state's coastal zone. The current maximum, outside the coastal zone, is 40 acres.

"The timber companies knew that if this bill made it out of committee, more attention would be paid to it by the media," said Forests Forever executive director Paul Hughes. "And they knew that once the public sees pictures of devastating clearcuts— and learns that this archaic practice is growing rapidly— the resulting outrage would pose an unstoppable political force."

In a clearcut, all of the vegetation in a timber harvest area is cut down and removed, burned, or killed with powerful herbicides. The bare soil, exposed to

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wind and rain, is torn up by heavy logging equipment.

“The first response most people have when we show them how damaging clearcuts are, is ‘I can’t believe we’re still allowing that.’” Hughes said. “I think people in California are fed up with the destruction of our forests for short-term profit.”

Forests Forever was the organizational sponsor of the measure, which Hughes called the “opening salvo” in a longer battle.

California’s forests are being clearcut at an increasingly rapid pace. Since 1990 nearly 687 square miles have been clearcut— more than three and a half times the surface area of Lake Tahoe. One company alone (Sierra Pacific Industries, based in Arnold) has been authorized to clearcut more than 250,000 acres in the Sierra Nevada in the past two decades.

Extremely destructive of the natural environment, clearcutting:

- Destroys wildlife habitat and corridors and endangers native plants and animals;
- Increases soil erosion and sedimentation in rivers and streams, thereby increasing the need for costly water treatment, diminishing the capacity of the state’s water storage facilities and harming fish populations;
- Boosts the risk of intense wildfires by converting cool, moist forests into sun-baked slash piles and later to fire-prone tree plantations;
- Degrades the state’s natural beauty, which in turn affects tourism, recreation, retirement and property values; and
- Contributes to global warming by removing a major natural storage reservoir (standing vegetation) for carbon dioxide, and by disturbing forest soils, thus causing them to release CO₂.

“Clearcutting has been going on for far too long in California,” Hughes said. “Too much has been lost already. It’s time to raise the stakes and call upon the state’s most powerful elected officials to support a ban on clearcutting.

“Forests Forever is asking its supporters to contact Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Lt. Gov. John Garamendi, and Attorney General Jerry Brown and tell them it’s past time we ended the barbarous practice of clearcutting California’s forests.”