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Study Shows California Water Quality Being Degraded by Clearcutting and Salvage Logging

MANTON, CA—A new study has documented that clearcutting and post-fire salvage logging is degrading water quality in California. The report, titled “An Analysis of Turbidity in Relation to Timber Harvesting in the Battle Creek Watershed, northern California,” was written by statistical hydrologist Jack Lewis in partnership with the Battle Creek Alliance, a community organization which has been monitoring water pollution in the Battle Creek Watershed.

Lewis analyzed data from the 1,700 measurements Battle Creek Alliance has collected for its Citizen’s Water Monitoring Project since 2009. Key findings of the analysis are:

- Increased turbidity (i.e. dirtiness of the water) is strongly associated with the amount of logging taking place in the watersheds that drain into the measurement sites.
- In watersheds that have been 30% cut, the average increase in turbidity is 200%. In watersheds that have been 90% cut, the average increase in turbidity is 3000%.
- These changes are far in excess of the Water Board’s turbidity standard for the Central Valley region.

These findings led Lewis to conclude that “turbidity is greatest in tributaries that have experienced the heaviest logging.”

The Battle Creek Watershed is a tributary to the Sacramento River. It is located east of Redding, in the foothills below Lassen Volcanic National Park. There is a \$128 million dollar project to restore endangered salmon to this watershed. However, there have been growing concerns about the impacts on these waters from the effects of clearcutting and other forms of intensive logging in the watershed. In addition to cutting all or most trees in an area, clearcutting can lead to increased soil erosion, which then muddies adjacent waters.

Extensive clearcutting in the Battle Creek Watershed began in 1998 and continued until 2012, when there was 27,000 acre fire in the area. Following the fire, the industrial timberland experienced widespread “salvage” logging, which was conducted under an exemption to state forestry regulations that allowed for even more extensive cutting. Local residents have voiced concerns that the regulatory agencies have not properly addressed the cumulative impacts on water, climate, fire behavior, and species diversity from this ongoing logging.

“Our regulatory agencies need to take action, rather than ignoring the evidence,” said Marily Woodhouse, director of Battle Creek Alliance, “This study shows that clearcutting and salvage logging are polluting California’s waters.”

The full report may be found here:

http://thebattlecreekalliance.org/uploads/Battle_Creek_Turbidity_Report.pdf

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