

click on this. . .


Prudential
 California Realty

The San Diego Union-Tribune.

(Page A-5)

Logging regulation should be tightened, scientist says

John Howard
 ASSOCIATED PRESS

26-May-1999 Wednesday

SACRAMENTO -- California's logging rules are inadequate, allowing widespread tree cutting that causes mudslides, hurts water supplies and endangers fish and wildlife, a federal scientist says.

In a report released yesterday, geologist Leslie Reid of the U.S. Forest Service accuses the California Department of Forestry of lax enforcement of the Forest Practices Act, the principal state law governing tree harvesting.

Reid urges the state to shift authority over logging rules from its forestry department to the cabinet-level Resources Agency, headed by Gov. Gray Davis' top environmental adviser.

California laws have not fully protected Northern California streams, wrote Reid, who played a key role in a state-federal agreement to preserve thousands of acres of ancient redwood trees in Humboldt County.

Some state forestry department staffers see their primary mission as facilitating production of "high-quality forest products," she added. The study reflects her research and was not endorsed by her agency.

Reid's study was released by an environmental coalition that includes the lobbying group for California's major water agencies. It was commissioned by Assemblyman Fred Keeley, D-Boulder Creek, who proposes tightening logging laws, increasing inspections and requiring timber companies to pay for it.

Forestry department spokeswoman Karen Terrill declined to comment on the study, saying agency officials had not yet seen it. The department does not have a position on Keeley's legislation, Terrill said.

Logging practices have been a thorny subject for years along California's north coast, where landowners have complained that excessive logging caused mudslides during heavy winter rain.

In December 1996, excessive logging by Pacific Lumber Co. was blamed for a mudslide that slammed into the tiny community of Stafford, about 250 miles north of San Francisco. The company denied the allegation.

"Basically, it destroyed one-third of our town. It took out all the property owners north of me, and this is not an isolated case," said Mike O'Neal, a Stafford property owner whose land was hit by the mudslide.

007680

The slide prompted the creation of a local homeowners group seeking tougher logging rules.

Among supporters of Keeley's legislation is the Association of California Water Agencies, which represents more than 400 agencies across California, most of which provide drinking water.

The group is not often identified as part of an environmental coalition, but spokeswoman Jennifer Persike-Becker said it favors tough logging laws to preserve fragile watersheds.

"More and more we've figured out that the watershed has to be protected, instead of dumping a bunch of chemicals at the other end, which is costly and not necessarily the best treatment," she said.

Reid's study suggests that timber harvest plans, the documents that companies which want to cut trees submit for state approval, "do not adequately examine the long-term impact of human activity, namely logging," according to the environmental coalition.

The study says heavily logged areas are more likely -- in some cases, nearly 10 times as likely -- "to suffer landslides than areas with forests older than 30 years. California's forest practice rules cannot prevent the increased risk of landslides."

Reid, whose research during the Headwaters Forest negotiations was credited by environmentalists with prompting tougher logging restrictions for Pacific Lumber Co., recommends that state forestry authorities be more open to outside research.

The financial impact of excessive logging is borne heavily by those who depend on water for their livelihoods, such as fishermen and boating guides, she wrote.

007681