

EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S SUMMARY REPORT
8:30 A.M., Thursday, October 28, 2010
Regional Water Quality Control Board
David C. Joseph Hearing Room
5550 Skylane Blvd., Ste. A
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

Item: 7

Subject: Update on Humboldt Redwood Company Ownership of former PALCO timberlands and strategy for development of watershed wide waste discharge requirements for Bear Creek near Scotia (a tributary to Eel River).

Introduction

Humboldt Redwood Company (HRC) will provide an update to the Board of their management activities since acquiring timberlands from the former Pacific Lumber Company (PALCO) in 2008. The presentation will discuss changes they have implemented in harvesting and land management practices on their ownership and examples of efforts to work collaboratively with Regional Board staff to develop long term strategies to manage their lands while protecting water quality.

Background and History

HRC was created in July 2008 through the reorganization of PALCO. HRC owns approximately 327 square miles (209,300 acres) of coast redwood and Douglas-fir forestland spanning across over 60 Northern California coastal watersheds with about 305 miles of fish-bearing streams and nearly 1,100 miles of streams supporting non-fish aquatic species in Humboldt County.

The ownership includes timberlands which have been actively harvested dating back to the early 1850's. In the mid-1980s, the intensity and rate of harvest in many of their watersheds increased significantly. Several large storm events occurred in the north coast of California in the 1990s, culminating in the largest event just before New Years' day 1997. These storms resulted in high rates of landsliding and erosion with significant sediment discharges from logging roads and areas with minimal vegetative coverage due to harvesting over the previous decade. These discharges impacted many streams in the area with excess sediment, smothering habitat of listed salmonid species, filling in channels and causing nuisance flooding, and impairing domestic water supplies.

In addition, removal of stream side trees that provide shade and changes in channel morphology caused by changes to sediment loading have combined and resulted in elevated water temperatures in some watersheds.

Five watersheds on the former PALCO's timberlands, Bear Creek, Jordan Creek, Stitz Creek, Freshwater Creek, and Elk Creek, were impacted quite heavily during this period. Several state agencies, including the Regional Board, found that significant adverse cumulative impacts to the beneficial uses of water had occurred due to sediment discharges resulting from timber harvesting and related activities.

In 2003, the Regional Board directed staff to develop watershed based waste discharge requirements (WWDRs) to address cumulative impacts in the five watersheds. In 2006, the Regional Board approved WWDRs for PALCO's timberlands in Elk and Freshwater Creeks. HRC continues to operate under those WWDRs.

In 2008, Regional Board staff requested that PALCO submit a Report of Waste Discharge (ROWD) for the Bear Creek that would describe a management strategy to address cumulative impacts and restore the beneficial uses of water. HRC owns approximately 95% of the 5,440 acre Bear Creek watershed, a tributary to the Lower Eel River. Intense ground disturbance from timber harvesting in Bear Creek, particularly during the period of unregulated logging between the late 1940s through the early 1970s, resulted in extremely high rates of sediment discharge from roads and landslides. Many of the mainstem stream segments in Bear Creek have been repeatedly buried by sediment from debris torrents during periodic large storm events, the most recent being the New Years' 1996/97 storm. Sediment delivery from roads and landslides has lessened in recent years, attributed in part to significant changes in forestry practices following creation of the Forest Practice Rules and PALCO's habitat conservation plan.

Upon acquiring the property in 2008, HRC stopped the practice of harvesting old growth trees and discontinued the use of clearcut silviculture in favor of partial harvesting methods.

HRC submitted a draft ROWD for watershed wide WDRs for Bear Creek for Regional Board staff review in June, 2010. The ROWD includes a framework to identify and treat existing sediment sources, prevent new sources, enhance natural processes that are restoring the stream, and continue their ongoing watershed trend monitoring and reporting program. Timber harvesting and related management activities permitted under the Bear Creek WWDR will comply with the Lower Eel River sediment and temperature TMDL.

**PRELIMINARY STAFF
RECOMMENDATION:**

This is an informational item only.