

Death of Emerald Creek

Since 1968, when Redwood National Park was created, large blocks of the land surrounding the park have been clear-cut. This practice and its effect on the park have become a focal point for local conservationists and fishermen. Their fight to stop the clear-cutting so close to public lands - possibly even in National Forests - has culminated locally in a Public Nuisance suit set to be heard by a Mendocino Judge in Humboldt County's Superior Court on July 15, 1974.

The suit, filed by the Natural Resources Defense Council, is directed at the three companies involved in logging the area surrounding the park - Louisiana Pacific, Simpson Timber Co. and Arcata Redwood Co.

Rudy Becking, Professor of Natural Resources at HSU, who will be a witness in the case, told the Independent News that Public Nuisance suits are usually filed in cases where private property or individuals suffer detrimental consequences of some act or practice. In this case, however, conservationists and fishermen have won the right to sue on behalf of public lands and the public's

right to keep those lands intact for present and future use.

The Redwood National Park was created by Congress to "Preserve significant examples of primeval coastal redwood forests and the streams and seashores with which they are associated..." Unfortunately, large portions of the watershed areas nourishing the preserved lands were not included within the park boundaries. And it is the contention of those bringing suit that the clear-cut logging of these essential watersheds pose an imminent threat to the ecological stability of Redwood Creek which runs through the middle of the park and its tributaries.

According to Becking, there is a natural balance between trees, soil, water and gravity in a forested watershed. Clear-cutting, he contends, upsets the balance suddenly by the unweighting of the restraining natural cover. This cover, he said, acts like a sponge to hold water, releasing it along with collected nutrients slowly into the streams. Without the cover, Becking pointed out, debris and silt will wash

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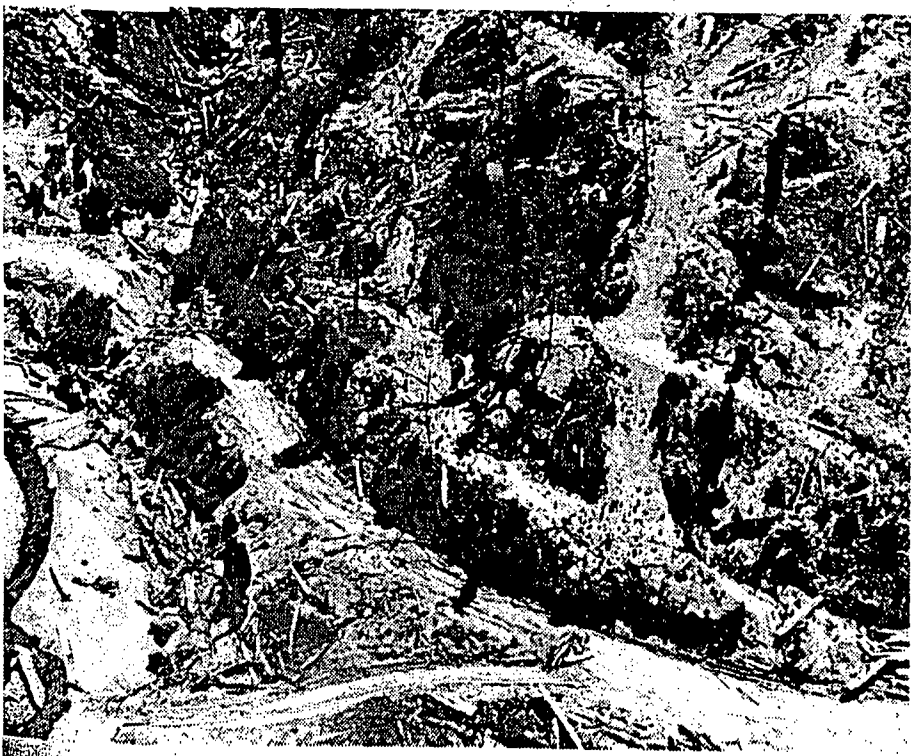
ANONYMOUS

EMERALD CREEK DYING



(Photography by Dave Vandemark)

The effects of clear-cut logging are visible on the slopes above Redwood National Park. Above is an overview with the patches of clear-cut like bald spots. A close-up aerial view shows the devastation of the watershed of a tributary of Redwood Creek, below.



down to the tributaries from the steep unprotected hills and will upset the balance, eventually destroying much - if not all - of the existing vegetation and aquatic life of the park.

There does not appear to be any denial by the timber companies that the practice of clear-cutting is going on. However, their public relations departments do deny that this practice does any damage to the park, as alleged in the Public Nuisance suit.

When asked about watershed management policies, Jim Hartly, public affairs representative for Simpson Timber, admitted this was a technical area about which he knew little. "Clear-cutting" he said "is a practice we prefer. We have had bad experiences with wind on trees that were left standing in the past, causing a good deal of damage and a waste of resource." Mature timber harvesting, he felt, such as done in selective cutting situations will cause damage to trees as well. Economically Hartly thinks that

clear-cutting is more feasible because it causes less damage to mature trees and young timber grown from scratch matures faster than in a natural forest state.

Wherever the truth may lie, conservationists and the lumber companies will confront each other in mid-July in Humboldt County Superior Court. So far county residents have heard little of this battle which has raged under wraps since 1969. The pending decision on clear-cutting in the Redwood Park watershed area promises to be an important one. Both sides will have to pull out all stops in what may be a landmark case.

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