



SIERRA CLUB

TEHIPITE CHAPTER

ATTENTION, FOREST ADVOCATES:

The Sierra Club Tehipite Chapter in Fresno is preparing to file a lawsuit against the U.S. Forest Service to halt a proposed logging project in a the Nelder Grove of Giant Sequoia Trees in the Sierra National Forest. The project area is located just south of Yosemite National Park. This so-called "emergency" logging project (hardly an emergency, given that the forest is emerging from ten feet of snow this past winter). It would, however, if the Forest Service succeeds in its plan, evade a legally required 2- to 5-year environmental review under the federal National Environmental Protection Act.

If you are concerned about this abuse of our environmental laws and want to be kept informed about our lawsuit, contact Gary Lasky at the Sierra Club Tehipite Chapter at tehipite.chapter@sierraclub.org or 559-790-3495.

By Chad Hanson, Ph.D. Director and Principal Ecologist The John Muir Project
The Sierra National Forest is implementing a huge commercial logging project in the Nelder Grove of Giant Sequoia Trees (see Gigantea Fuels Reduction and Restoration Project, at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/sierra/?project=63529>). The agency began a portion of the logging last fall, without first allowing any public comment or conducting environmental analysis, claiming that an "emergency exemption" from the National Environmental Policy Act allowed them to do this, ostensibly to protect mature sequoias from wildfire. No meaningful explanation was included to defend the "emergency" claim, especially since the Grove recently experienced a mixed-intensity fire when the Railroad fire spread through nearly all of the Grove in 2017, and potential for another fire remains low.

The Forest Service's 1,432-acre logging project includes commercial "thinning" of live, mature trees up to 20 inches in diameter in the low/moderate-intensity fire areas, and post-fire logging and clearcutting of ecologically-important snags (standing dead trees) in the high-intensity fire areas. The Forest Service plans to sell the live trees to logging companies for lumber, and plans to sell snags to logging companies to burn for energy production at biomass facilities that emit large amounts of carbon and pollute the air of adjacent environmental justice communities. The Forest Service would keep the revenue for its budget.

There are numerous major problems with this logging plan. Among them is the fact that the Forest Service claims there is a need for "reforestation" of sequoias in the high-intensity fire patches. However, detailed field surveys by independent scientists has found abundant natural post-fire sequoia regeneration in these high-intensity fire patches in the Nelder Grove, in the places where no post-fire logging has occurred yet, but over 80% mortality of giant sequoia seedlings and saplings where post-fire logging has already been conducted. The logging machinery is crushing and killing the young, new sequoia trees that the Forest Service falsely claims does not exist. Sequoia seedlings are being cut along with snags, and bulldozed into giant piles, waiting to be hauled away to biomass energy facilities.

In addition, a large and growing body of the Forest Service's own science is directly contradicting

the agency's claims about logging as a wildfire management approach. For example, regarding post-fire logging and tree planting, Forest Service scientists concluded: "Areas that were salvage-logged and planted after the initial fire burned more severely than comparable unmanaged areas . . ." (<https://www.pnas.org/doi/full/10.1073/pnas.0700229104>).

And, in a huge 30-year analysis of wildfires, Forest Service scientists recently concluded: "More open forests with lower biomass had higher fire severity, because the type of open, lower-biomass forests resulting from thinning and other logging activities have 'hotter, drier, and windier microclimates, and those conditions decrease dramatically over relatively short distances into the interior of older forests with multi-layer canopies and high tree density . . ." (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s42408-021-00118-z>).

National Forests were established for the public good and include most of the nation's remaining examples of intact forests. Out National Forests are a wellspring of clean water for millions of Americans, a legacy for wildlife, sequester vast quantities of carbon important in climate change

mitigation, and provide recreation and economic opportunities to rural communities if responsibly managed. Thought it may seem at first glance that a post-fire landscape is a catastrophe, numerous scientific studies tell us that even in the patches where forest fires burn most intensely, the resulting wildfire habitats are among the most ecologically diverse on western forestlands and are essential to support the full richness of forest biodiversity.

Post-fire renewal of the forest, known as "snag forest," is quite simply some of the best wildlife habitat in forests, and is an essential stage of natural processes that eventually becomes old-growth forest over time. This unique habitat is not mimicked by clearcut logging, as the Forest Service incorrectly has suggested at times.

After a fire, the new forest is particularly vulnerable to logging disturbances that can set back the forest renewal process for decades. Post-fire logging has been shown to eliminate habitat for many bird species that depend on snags. It compacts soils, removes biological habitat (snags and downed logs) essential for new forest growth, and spreads invasive species that increase the flammability of the new forest. While it is often claimed that such logging is needed to restore conifer growth and lower fuel hazards after a fire, many studies have shown that logging tractors often kill most conifer seedlings and other important vegetation and actually increases flammable logging slash left on site. Increased chronic sedimentation to streams due to the extensive road network and runoff from logging on steep slopes degrades aquatic organisms and water quality.

