

## Rim fire salvage logging wins support

By John Holland

Several environmental groups pledged Tuesday to support the salvage logging proposed for parts of the Rim fire area.

They joined timber industry and other leaders in Tuolumne County in a letter urging the U.S. Forest Service to approve the logging, which is proposed for about a tenth of the 257,314-acre fire zone.

The letter was from a coalition called Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions, which was working on forest issues even before last year's fire charred parts of the Stanislaus National Forest, Yosemite National Park and private land.

The group said the dead trees must be cut before they rot beyond usefulness for lumber. It added that the work would reduce fuel for future fires while clearing the way for replanting and other restoration projects.

"We stand united in opposing any delay," said Mike Albrecht, an industry forester and chairman of the coalition, in a written statement.

Vice chairman John Buckley, executive director of the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center, agreed: "It is far more logical to have the industry remove dead trees with a return for taxpayers than to let the wood deteriorate so it loses sawlog value. In that case, taxpayers would end up having to pay huge amounts of money to remove the dead wood to reduce unsafe fuel levels. Delay makes no sense."

The letter was addressed to Regional Forester Randy Moore, who oversees all of the national forests in California. Susan Skalski, supervisor of the Stanislaus National Forest, will make a decision on the logging.

The blaze, the largest in the Sierra Nevada's recorded history, is believed to have started Aug. 17 from a hunter's illegal campfire near the confluence of the Tuolumne and Clavey rivers. The hunter has not been identified.

The logging would cover 29,648 acres of fire-killed commercial timber scattered around the national forest part of the burn. It would not be done in brushland, young plantations, river corridors or conifer stands with less severe damage.

Yosemite does not do salvage logging but can remove trees that threaten people or buildings. Sierra Pacific Industries, the largest private landowner in the fire perimeter, is doing its own logging under state regulation. It has two sawmills in Tuolumne County.

Salvage logging after past fires has sometimes drawn opposition from environmentalists. They have noted that dead trees provide habitat for wildlife and help stabilize the soil, and that machinery can damage sensitive sites.

Potential opposition to Rim fire salvage logging prompted Republican Rep. Tom McClintock, whose district includes Tuolumne County, to introduce a bill that would exempt the plan from the usual review. The coalition said the letter should make the legislation moot.

The letter urges approval of a separate plan to remove hazardous trees along 194 miles of “high-use” forest roads and on 1,329 acres developed for camping, power lines or other uses.

Among the signers are the Tuolumne County Farm Bureau, American Forest Resource Council, Tuolumne County Alliance for Resources and Environment, Central Sierra Audubon Society, Tuolumne Group of the Sierra Club, Tuolumne River Trust, California Forestry Association, Tuolumne Band of Me-Wuk Indians and an off-road motorcycle club named Merced Dirt Riders.

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