

USFS today begins defending desire to log Angora burn area

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Responding for the first time to a lawsuit by conservationists, the U.S. Forest Service says the threat of another major wildfire like the one that destroyed about 250 homes at Lake Tahoe four years ago outweighs any concerns that its plans to log much of what's left of the burned forest would harm a rare woodpecker or other wildlife.

But environmentalists suing to block the post-fire salvage logging on Tahoe's south shore say the agency is exaggerating the fire danger and downplaying the anticipated impacts of logging about half of the 3,000 acres that burned in the Angora fire in June 2007.



Charred remains of the Angora burn area in May 2011, nearly four years after the fire.

Photo/LTN

Lawyers for both sides are scheduled to argue their cases in U.S. District Court in Sacramento today as the opponents try to persuade Judge Garland E. Burrell Jr. to find the logging plan illegal and order the agency to conduct another review of the potential impacts of the project that will cost taxpayers an estimated \$3 million.

The Forest Service said in recent court filings that the lawsuit takes issue with “inconsequential, technical deficiencies” in its environmental assessment and formal determination last July that the logging will cause no significant harm to the black-backed woodpecker or anything else.

The critics’ “sole interest in unlogged post-fire habitat is not paramount to the other public interests in forest restoration and the promotion of the diversity of wildlife,” Justice Department lawyers representing the federal agency wrote in a legal brief filed June 13.

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