

Opinion: Clear-cuts impoverish forests, economy

By Katherine K. Evatt

I spent a recent Monday on a Sierra Pacific Industries' forest tour outside the rural Calaveras County town of West Point. Sierra Pacific has clear-cut thousands of acres in Calaveras. It has removed nearly every tree on each site, scraped off and burned the surface vegetation, deep-ripped the soil and sprayed herbicides to kill leafy plants that compete with newly planted conifers.

Sierra Pacific, California's largest private landowner, is owned by Fortune 400 member "Red" Emmerson. The corporation owns 1.7 million acres of timberland in the state and plans to clear-cut more than a million acres. Over the last decade or so, it has received the state's permission to clear-cut – or near-clear-cut – more than a quarter million acres of its land, nearly 391 square miles.

Much of this activity has occurred in the Mokelumne River watershed, where we took our tour.

Clear-cuts destroy existing wildlife habitat. They release massive amounts of carbon from the soil. Impacted roads release sediment into streams. And clear-cuts tear at the hearts of those of us who love the Sierra's forests.

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