

Judge hears arguments in sealing forest fire documents case

By Denny Walsh, Sacramento Bee

A Sacramento federal judge heard arguments Thursday and will rule later on The Bee's objections to sealing documents that allegedly contain evidence of misconduct and fraud on the part of U.S. Forest Service employees.

Timber giant Sierra Pacific Industries submitted the documents in partial support of its motion for summary judgment in the company's lawsuit contesting the government's refusal to let Forest Service employees testify in related state court litigation.

A bitter legal struggle between the United States and Sierra Pacific grew out of a mammoth wildfire in 2007 that devoured 65,000 acres in Plumas and Lassen counties.

Much of the damage was in two national forests, and the government sued Sierra Pacific, claiming the fire started when a bulldozer belonging to a contractor working for the company struck a rock.

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