

Sabotage heats up logging debate

SPOKANE (AP) — Loggers have been reluctant to recognize it and most environmentalists denounce it. But both sides agree "monkeywrenching" has driven fear and suspicion into the debate over logging the nation's forests.

Monkeywrenching is a term taken from Edward Abbey's 1975 novel, "The Monkey Wrench Gang," about a small band of saboteurs who target roadbuilders and other developers in the name of environmental preservation.

When applied to logging, the term often refers to driving spikes into trees or damaging logging equipment. When a saw blade hits a spike, it can shred the blade and injure a logger or mill worker.

It's unclear whether such sabotage is on the rise. But awareness of it is, due to federal investigations and increased industry publicity.

"These guys are domestic terrorists," said Bruce Vincent of Libby, Mont., the director of an industry coalition called Communities for a Great Northwest. "We thought long and hard before we spoke up about these psychotics. But at some point, the public deserves to know."

John Gatchell, director of the Montana Wilderness Association, likewise denounces environmental sabotage. But he also criticizes what he sees as industry efforts to assign guilt when none is proven.

"People like Bruce Vincent make a career out of trying to smear all people who care about the environment with that brush," Gatchell said.

"Don't you think it's unusual that they don't have suspects in these crimes? It's possible the industry does these things. If you were Columbo, you'd sit down and say, 'Who would benefit from this kind of crime?' Certainly it's not the environmental community."

U.S. Forest Service and in-

dustry officials say they can't think of a single tree harvest that was stopped because it had been spiked.

"If we stopped a sale because of the spiking, it would encourage them to do more," said Larry Guenther, accountant at a Pablo, Mont., mill where logs from the Postoffice Timber Sale from Clearwater Forest in Idaho will be processed. Forest Service workers found spikes in timber from that sale.

Industry officials say the monetary damage has become substantial. Vincent said environmental saboteurs did \$220,000 worth of damage to logging equipment in north-west Montana last year.

Spiked logs from a Colville National Forest timber sale last spring cost the Vaagen Bros. Lumber Inc. sawmill in Republic, Wash., \$57,000 in saw damage and lost productivity, company officials said.

Vaagen and other mills have started using metal detectors to screen logs that may have been spiked.

Bill Pickell of the Washington Contract Loggers Association said spiking and other damaging acts are having a major impact on insurance premiums and how the industry goes about its business.

"In the past we were confident enough that we didn't need watchmen and security devices. Now, weapons are appearing on logging sites, and someone's going to get hurt," Pickell said.

Tree spiking is a federal crime with penalties ranging from one year to life imprisonment, depending on the damage and personal injury that result.

Only one logging injury has been reported as a result of monkeywrenching and it involved tree spiking. However, there was never any evidence that an environmentalist placed the nail that caused a saw blade to explode in the face of a California millworker in 1987.

Nor has damage to logs and logging equipment been well documented. John Davis, editor of the Earth First Journal, said an upcoming article suggests that monkeywrenching may be causing \$20 million of damage to logging interests in national forests.

Ben Hull, special agent for the Wenatchee National Forest, conducted the Forest Service's only survey of sabotage on national forests. During an 18-month period in 1987 and 1988, Hull found:

• 219 serious acts of vandalism to Forest Service or contractors' property, amounting to \$4.5 million damage.

• 42 letters received threatening sabotage or vandalism if the Forest Service did not prevent or stop certain logging activities.

• 32 demonstrations that temporarily halted logging or road building, resulting in \$201,000 in losses.

Three-fourths of that activity was in the Pacific Northwest and the Northern Rockies.

Dave Foreman, a founder of the 10-year-old radical environmentalist group Earth First!, said he supports the conscious-raising that monkeywrenching causes while preferring legal methods to save the nation's ancient forests.

"I don't like the idea of destroying anyone's property. But it's just like the Boston Tea Party. That was an act of monkeywrenching," said Foreman, the editor of "Ecodefense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching."

Foreman is one of five defendants in an Arizona case alleging conspiracy to cut power lines to three nuclear power plants. He was arrested in May 1989 following an FBI investigation.

The FBI also is investigating seven Missoula, Mont., environmentalists in the alleged spiking of the Postoffice Timber Sale.

Hydroelectric growth called damaging

MONTREAL (AP) — Canadian and U.S. environmental groups said plans for further hydroelectric development of James Bay spell ecological disaster as the National Energy Board began hearings Monday into Hydro-Quebec's contracts to sell power to the United States.

The flooding of vast tracts of northern Quebec wilderness will diminish waterfowl nesting sites, cause mercury contamination in fish and send millions of tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere from rotting vegetation, said Bernard Craik, spokesman for the Grand Council of the Crees of Quebec.

"We must learn to live along with our environment rather than attempting to redesign nature as has been done in the Brazilian rain forest with disastrous results," Craik told a news conference.

The government-owned utility has a 22-year contract starting in 1990 to sell 450 megawatts of power to Vermont for \$7 billion and a 20-year deal to supply 1,000 megawatts to New York for \$17 billion beginning in 1995.

The contracts are part of Hydro's push to close deals over the next 10 years to export 3,500 megawatts of uninterrupted power.

Craik said the utility does not have the surplus electricity needed to sell to the United States, and said it had thousands of power failures in Quebec in 1988-89 due partly to a decrease in precipitation.

He said the utility is under pressure to seek permits for construction before proper environmental and cost analyses can be completed.

Jeffrey Wollock of the James Bay Defense Coalition said the New York environmental group

planned to intervene at the hearings to oppose the development.

"The people of New York — whether they like it or not — are investors in James Bay II to the tune of (\$17 billion)," Wollock said, referring to the value of the New York contract.

"What (New York energy planners) didn't tell us was that we were making the down payment on the destruction of the largest, most intact wilderness territory in North America."

Bernard Roy, a lawyer representing the utility, told the federal panel that some environmental issues raised may be "passionately interesting," but they don't fall under the board's mandate.

"Hydro-Quebec is not here to submit its installation plans to environmental scrutiny," said Roy, former right-hand man to Prime Minister Brian Mulroney.

But the board maintains it has the jurisdiction to consider environmental impacts resulting from electricity exports.

Hydro has always held there is "no environmental impact (from the further development of Hydro-Quebec) that cannot be mitigated," said Jean-Claude Richard, the utility's vice president.

Earlier, before the hearing began, the Cree complained about the lack of opportunity for public discussion of the project.

Premier Robert Bourassa, who has hitched the province's economic future to James Bay, has refused calls for an independent inquiry into the project.

In the 1970s, builders of Quebec's hydro dams created enormous reservoirs which the Cree and Inuit say poisoned the fish and created enormous environmental damage.

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