

Locked Down for Old-Growth Forests

CASCADIA FOREST DEFENDERS PROTEST SIERRA PACIFIC INDUSTRIES

By Alicia Santiago



Photo by Alicia Santiago

On the morning of July 5, dozens of community members and organizers from Cascadia Forest Defenders protested outside of Sierra Pacific Industries (formerly Seneca timber) to stand in solidarity against timber sales.

The protest took place outside gate four of SPI. Chants of “clearcuts? No way. Not ever. Not today,” took place while blocking the way of semi trucks and workers.

Upon arrival, SPI workers told protesters where they could legally stand. After listening, protesters took place between the entrance gates of SPI just off SPI property.

SPI operation trucks were blocked in by protesters who were locked down using a linked chain connecting three chairs between gates, singing about saving the future and acting now.

Honking from logging trucks continued as the protesters remained seated.

When six police cars arrived at the scene, officers asked, “How can we remedy this situation? You’re inhibiting their ability to work,” referencing the SPI workers.

Protesters stood in place, saying, “Yes, we are.”

The Bureau of Land Management’s N126 timber sale is in the coastal rainforest north of Highway 126, according to environmental group Cascadia Wildlands. The 33,000-acre project area would include commercial logging of log stands ranging from 30 to 130 years old. Some of the logging is on late-successional reserve forests, which are specifically set aside for spotted owl habitat and old-growth characteristics under the Northwest Forest Plan.

Riley Fields, spokesperson for Cascadia Forest Defenders, said the most important thing is to send a message to SPI that the community will do anything to stop the N126 sale and the sale of public forests and public lands.

“The N126 sale is the sale of the Bureau of Land Management land. It’s over 25,000 acres, and while they’re saying that they’re just thinning the forest, field checking says otherwise,” Fields said, adding that keeping our forests alive is integral to keeping our water clean and the community healthy.

Fields went on to say that a lot of community members are opposing these sales because their water sources come from BLM land.

“Allowing these sales of the N126 sale to go through will inevitably affect their water drinking sources,” they said.

Fields says this is just the beginning, and that community members are willing to do anything to stop these sales of public forests.

In April 2022, the Biden administration signed an executive order for efforts to conserve the nation’s forests and communities. Biden said that conserving old-growth

and mature forests on federal lands and supporting sustainable forest products is crucial to the protection of local ecosystems. The BLM and U.S. Forest Service are in the middle of rulemaking processes to increase protections for carbon-rich mature and old-growth forests.

Debra McGee, one of the community members locked down between SPI gates, said as an educator, she cannot allow the environment and the next generation’s future to be ruined by slow-moving action.

“How can I, in good conscience, continue to educate children, when at the same time allowing their habitat to be destroyed?” McGee asked.

She said that what causes species to go extinct is the loss of habitat, which she noted is happening right here, right now. Children, she said, need to know that politicians and corporations like SPI are not responding to the crisis that is logging in these mature, old-growth forests.

As a 70-year-old woman, McGee said she and others standing with her are able to take this risk because they are passionate about the future.

“The old growth brings life to so many species that most of us don’t even understand how important they are. But they are important, and we have to protect them. And that’s what we’re doing here today,” McGee said.

Malcolm Rand, a member of a Cascadia Forest Defenders affinity group called WRENCH, said the priority is to hold big corporations like Sierra Pacific accountable.

“I think it is so important that we are highlighting the fact that this is one of the largest landowning corporations in the United States, but no bidding on public old growth and mature forests,” he said.

Sierra Pacific Industries, a lumber production company, is one of the largest growing lumber industries in the U.S., according to *Forbes*. SPI announced in February that when it completes work on the mill site, the “Eugene complex will be one of the largest in the U.S.”

The landscape of the N126 sale stretches from Hwy 126 southwest of Eugene up to Hwy 36 near Triangle Lake, Rand said.

“There are countless communities and hundreds and thousands of folks that live in those communities that all rely directly on the forest. And specifically, the Bureau of Land Management managed forests for their drinking water.”

Rand said the areas in the timber sale are historically known for being sacrifice zones or hotspots for chemical pollution where clearcut logs are sprayed with herbicides, limiting fresh and safe drinking water for community members.

Protesters left the site around 10:20 am after finding their message was heard, and no arrests were made. ■