

SAVE JACKSON STATE FOREST

PRESS RELEASE

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CAL FIRE Reneges on Logging Promise: Activists Warn Response of Protests, Civil Disobedience

Rally in Jackson Forest Scheduled for Sunday Aug. 28

FORT BRAGG, Calif.—CalFire announced today that logging would resume in the Jackson Demonstration State Forest in Mendocino County, previously put on “pause” while negotiations with local tribal nations were underway. CalFire made this announcement without informing the tribes that they have been at the table with for six months.

Michael Hunter, chair of the Coyote Valley Band of Pomo Indians, said he was “shocked” by the news and raised doubts about the whole effort. “The State did not even bother to notify The Tribe beforehand. The State wants to continue logging our Pomo Homeland—the Jackson Demonstration State Forest—while negotiating a co-management agreement with the Coyote Valley Tribe. This makes me question the State’s seriousness about Co-Managing ancestral lands. The State still does not understand that there is a difference between Co-Management and tribal consultation. Tribes must not be relegated to an advisory role in managing their ancestral lands. For co-management to succeed, it must be a government to government relationship that creates equal decision making powers. I worry that the State does not understand the importance of the words they are using. We must ensure that co-management creates an equal relationship between the State and the Tribes with equal decision making authority.”

CalFire plans to resume logging four controversial Timber Harvest Plans (THPs) that were halted by protests last year. These THPs were written without community or tribal involvement and directly threaten large second growth coastal redwoods and tribal Sacred Sites. Instead of listening to the community, CalFire has unilaterally made slight adjustments to the plan and is restarting operations.

“CalFire appears intent on burning bridges,” said Matt Simmons, staff attorney at the Environmental Protection Information Center. “The ‘pause’ in operations made community input and tribal negotiations possible. Now, any progress or goodwill has been shattered. We call on CalFire not to resume logging until they have a new Management Plan.”

“Redwood forests have amazing climate mitigation potential and management needs to maximize that potential.” said Sara Rose, a youth activist with Mendocino County Youth for Climate. “My generation will have to live with what the planet becomes if we don’t save it. We have to face the reality of Climate Change.”

Resuming operations also calls into question the new “vision” outlined by CalFire released on August 19th, which among other things, promised tribal co-management of the Jackson Demonstration State Forest. That CalFire is considering a new vision at all is the direct result of more than two years of tireless advocacy by a broad community that was appalled by the way the State was managing this forest. Until they were stopped by forest defenders, CalFire was authoring timber harvest plans (THPs) that engaged in climate change denial, logged some of the largest trees in the forest, and damaged Native American Sacred Sites. Many of the changes discussed in CalFire’s vision sound good in theory. The Coalition was initially encouraged that CalFire is discussing co-management and the fact that the forest will no longer be funded entirely by timber sales. However, the announced resumption of logging calls into question whether or not these promises can be successfully implemented and whether co-management would be pursued in good faith.

On Sunday August 28th, from 1-4pm the Mendocino County Youth for Climate are holding a rally at the Caspar Scales in JDSF. The Coalition encourages members of the public who support changing the forest’s mandate and want logging to remain paused to make their voices heard there.

Background:

The Jackson Demonstration State Forest has been operating under the same state law since 1947. This law requires Jackson to produce timber and sees the forest as little more than an economic resource. This law was written at a time when the values of the people of California were completely different than they are today. In 1947, the State did not recognize tribal sovereignty, was not concerned with biodiversity loss, and did not understand the risks of climate change. These different values have led to the unacceptable practices that sparked the movement to Save Jackson and are on display in CalFire’s decision to resume logging.

To take one shocking example, since at least 1999, CalFire has known that its road management activities were destroying Sacred Sites belonging to Northern Pomo and Coast Yuki Peoples. Cal Fire’s own archeological report stated that because of certain activities within the forest

including timber harvest, road maintenance, and recreation “the prehistoric archeological record of JDSF is gradually but inexorably being depleted.”¹ The report specifically called for road maintenance activities to halt in the vicinity of known sacred sites until a road maintenance/archaeological site protection plan could be implemented.² The report also warned that there were likely many additional undiscovered sites that were threatened by additional timber activities. To date, Calfire has never developed a road maintenance/archeological site protection plan, – rather they continue to propose further road construction that runs straight through ancestral sacred sites. This is completely out of step with Governor Newsom’s September 25, 2020 Statement of Administration policy which states it is the policy of the State to “[f]acilitate the access of California Native Americans to sacred sites and cultural resources” located on State held lands.

CalFire has also regularly logged some of the largest trees in the Jackson forest. If not for the actions of community protestors, CalFire would have allowed a timber company to cut down a nearly 200-year old coast redwood that was 77” diameter at breast height. Coast redwoods like those found in Jackson sequester and store more carbon than any other forest type on the planet. When they are logged, the vast majority of their carbon is released to the atmosphere, directly fueling climate change. In timber harvest plans for the Jackson, CalFire has questioned human’s contributions to climate change, writing, “exactly how and to what extent human activity plays a role in global climate change appears to be unknown.”³

The Coalition wants to transform Jackson into a Forest for the 21st Century. A place where management is primarily focused on tribal inclusion and co-management, forest and watershed restoration, carbon sequestration and climate resilience, biodiversity conservation and scientific research, all while providing equitable access to nature for the over 10 million Californians who live within 3.5 hours of Jackson. These are all management objectives California desperately needs demonstrated today, not commercial logging. If CalFire and the Jackson Advisory Group are serious about this new vision, then the Coalition encourages them to support legislation that will change Jackson's mandate. In the 21st century, our State Forests should no longer be treated as commercial timberlands with a mandate to maximize production of timber. Instead, we should be prioritizing tribal sovereignty, climate resilience and access to nature.

¹ Betts, The Current Status of Prehistoric Resources on Jackson Demonstration State Forest, Mendocino County California (1999) p. 23.

² Betts, The Current Status of Prehistoric Resources on Jackson Demonstration State Forest, Mendocino County California (1999) p. 25.

³ Mitchell Creek THP p. 242