

Logging In Los Gatos: What Is Happening?

The San Jose Water Company (SJWC) has submitted a plan to log 1,000 acres of redwood, Douglas fir and oak trees alongside Los Gatos Creek. This stand is among the largest of its kind in Santa Clara County and is an invaluable resource for the entire area. These trees protect the drinking water supply and act as a natural barrier against life threatening forest fires for thousands of residents.

The area to be logged commences two miles from downtown Los Gatos at the south end of Lexington Reservoir. It extends five miles along Los Gatos Creek and crosses over a dozen tributaries before ending south of Lake Elsman near Summit Road. Logging will occur alongside residential areas – as close as one hundred yards to hundreds of homes and numerous schools and day care centers.

The residential communities of Aldercroft Heights and Chemeketa Park draw their drinking water directly from Los Gatos Creek at the downstream end of the logging area. The creek also feeds Lexington Reservoir which supplies water to the entire Santa Clara Valley. SJWC has water intakes at the far upstream end of the logging – within Lake Elsman. Drinking water for local residents will be put at risk by the increased sedimentation and introduction of organic matter that is an inevitable by-product of logging in watersheds. Logging is so incompatible with drinking water that San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, Santa Cruz, East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) and Marin County-virtually every large west coast city-expressly forbid logging in their water supply watersheds. To date, Santa Clara County does not protect its water supply in a similar fashion.

The largest, most fire-resistant redwoods form the vast majority of trees planned to be cut down. Forestry and fire scientists agree that removing the largest trees in a forest increases fire danger. This stand of redwoods acts as a buffer between thousands of acres of fire prone chaparral land and hundreds of homes. The healthy redwood forest acts as natural fire barrier protecting the lives of residents and the security of their homes. The scientific fact is that this barrier will be weakened if SJWC has their way.

The logging plan – called a Non-Industrial Timber Management Plan or NTMP - allows for logging to occur in perpetuity without any further public or agency review. As the larger trees mature, they will be chopped down. If the plan is approved logging will occur forever even if San Jose Water Company sells the land or hires a different company to perform the logging. Decades from now, no matter what changes in water needs, land use or residential development occur in Santa Clara County, the Los Gatos Creek watershed will be logged. Residents will be faced with helicopters flying overhead, logging trucks on narrow mountain roads and noise from chainsaws. Despite their claims that logging will only occur a few weeks a year, SJWC has gone so far as requesting special permission from the California Department of Forestry to perform logging operations year round. Property values are sure to be harmed as residents will be obliged to tell prospective home buyers about the perpetual logging planned for their neighborhoods. Furthermore, the logging area lies over the San Andreas Fault and is prone to landslides. Harvesting the largest trees from steep slopes could pose a danger to area homes as the risk of landslides will increase.

The proposed logging is irresponsible due to increased fire danger, risks to drinking water and threats to quality of life, safety and property values. All citizens of Santa Clara County will be harmed if this valuable natural resource is damaged. The community is banding together to fight the plan. Petition drives have gathered over 2,000 signatures from residents opposed to the logging. A citizen's action group, Neighbors Against Irresponsible Logging (N.A.I.L.), has been formed to prevent the plan from ever taking affect. Local officials have been contacted; experts on hydrology, fire prevention and responsible logging have been hired. There is still time to fight SJWC's plan. The next steps in the fight include detailed responses to the NTMP and public hearings with the California Department of Forestry. All citizens are urged to participate.

Those opposed to the plan are urged to join N.A.I.L. as well as contact the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors and the California Department of Forestry to voice your concerns. Facts about the NTMP, information on forest fires, water protection, contact information for public officials and notification about public meetings and additional supporting data can be found at www.mountainresource.org.