
It's one of two fronts on which the timber corporation is wrangling with the 44-square-mile Albion-Little River Fire Protection District, which has about 3,000 residents along the Mendocino County coast. The other battle is over the company's practice of poisoning unwanted trees and leaving them to decompose in forests, which critics say creates a fire hazard.

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expenses and donations of time, money and equipment.

MRC is working with neighbors, local fire districts and CalFire to encourage the return of SRA fees to local, rural fire districts.

MRC has been discussing its Tan Oak treatment strategies with our neighbors for more than a decade. Fire safety is currently under study by a working group established by the Board of Supervisors and coordinated by the County Executive. The treatment of tan oak is an important part of this review.

MRC is committed to working with our neighbors and welcomes opportunities to discuss MRC's response to Tan Oak treatment and fire safety. Treating Tan Oak is crucial to full restoration of our forest in Mendocino County.

These discussions are a natural part of our relationship with our neighbors. Characterizing these long-term, ongoing discussions as, "wrangling," is the reporter's opinion.

- 1. The Board of Supervisors directed the County Executive Officer to coordinate a review of the County Fire Plan through the Mendocino Fire Safe Council to include a review of the treatment of tan oak as it relates to fire safety.
 - a. The Board of Supervisors allocated \$25,000 to the Fire Safe Council to update the county wide fire plan. The money was delivered in July 2015.*
 - b. The Fire Safe Council initiated a Working Group and invited**

	<p><i>all interested parties including citizens, students, retirees, employees and public officials to participate in this process.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>c. The working group is open to all and has begun the process of reviewing fire safety.</i> <i>d. The Fire Safe Council will provide public updates.</i> <i>e. The Working Group brought its findings back to the Board of Supervisors for disclosure and public discussion.</i> <p><i>2. MRC committed to support the formation of the Working Group involving all interested parties to fully study fire risk including the questions associated with the treatment of tan oak.</i></p> <p><i>3. MRC is working in Sacramento at all levels of the government to encourage the return of State Responsibility Area (SRA) funds to local, rural fires districts. In Mendocino County the <u>State has collected over \$3million in SRA fees. To date, less than \$10,000 has been returned to local districts.</u></i></p>
<p>The tax — approved by 83 percent of district voters last year and set to begin generating revenue in January — is aimed at keeping the struggling volunteer fire department afloat and spreading the cost of fire protection among residents and owners of timberland within the fire district’s boundaries.</p> <p>“We have calls for both fire and injuries” on commercial timberland, said fire district board President Chris Skyhawk.</p>	<p><i>MRC has filed an appeal of the Measure M parcel tax. MRC repeatedly raised concerns with the Fire District Board prior to filing an appeal. MRC pays for fire safety in the form of property taxes, timber yield taxes, other expenses, and donations of time, money and equipment.</i></p> <p><i>MRC is working with neighbors, local fire districts and CalFire to encourage the return of SRA fees to local, rural fire districts.</i></p> <p><i>In addition to CalFire and local fire districts, MRC provides infrastructure, equipment, services and personnel to assist Fire Safety activities.</i></p>

<p>The tax, known as Measure M, is expected to generate about \$105,000 annually, raising the district’s yearly budget to about \$250,000, he said.</p>	<p><i>MRC pays for fire safety in the form of property taxes, timber yield taxes, other expenses, and donations of time, money and equipment. The State needs to return SRA fees to rural counties.</i></p>
<p>Of the anticipated new tax revenue, about \$34,000 would be paid by the owners of industrial timberland in the district. Mendocino Redwood owns the majority of that land, followed closely by the nonprofit Conservation Fund, Skyhawk said.</p>	
<p>But Mendocino Redwood Co. says the local tax is unlawful because timber properties fall under the jurisdiction of the state firefighting agency, Cal Fire, not local fire authorities. Mendocino Redwood, along with a sister business, owns 438,000 acres in Mendocino, Humboldt and Sonoma counties.</p> <p>“The county should not issue tax bills to MRC for its commercial timberland under Measure M. If the county fails to comply with the law, MRC intends to pay the levied taxes under protest,” seek a refund under the California tax code “and pursue available legal remedies,” states a letter to Mendocino County officials and signed by Stephen Johnson, one of the Ukiah-based attorneys representing the company. Mendocino Redwood sent a second letter to the fire district, seeking to appeal the</p>	<p><i>MRC has filed an appeal of the Measure M parcel tax on the grounds that it is illegal and that MRC already pays for fire safety in the form of property taxes, timber yield taxes, other expenses, and donations of time, money and equipment.</i></p> <p><i>In addition, as the article states, the local tax is unlawful because timber properties fall under the jurisdiction of the state firefighting agency, CalFire, not local fire authorities.</i></p> <p><i>MRC has repeatedly raised its concerns with the Fire District Board prior to filing an appeal.</i></p>

<p>tax.</p> <p>The attorneys and Mendocino Redwood president Mike Jani declined to comment on the tax appeal.</p> <p>It's unusual for local fire departments to tax timberland. Skyhawk was unaware of any other fire district with a similar tax, but he said it makes sense.</p> <p>The fire district's local firefighters and other personnel are often the first to respond to fires and medical calls for injured timber workers in the area, Skyhawk said. Fires on nearby timberland may not be the district's responsibility, but letting a fire burn for longer than necessary ultimately endangers both the forest and district residents, he said.</p> <p>"We don't say, 'That's on land that's not part of our assessment structure,'" Skyhawk said.</p>	
<p>The costs of fighting fires are increasing and the agency needs to find more funding if it is to remain effective, he said. District officials didn't think it was fair to lay the cost entirely on residents.</p> <p>"We've been creative and perhaps somewhat bold with Measure M," Skyhawk said.</p>	<p><i>MRC truly understands the concerns of local officials about the increasing costs of fighting fires. If the state would make good on its promise to return SRA fees to the local counties, much of these increased costs would be mitigated.</i></p>
<p>The district will be considering the timber company's appeal at its meeting on Wednesday.</p>	<p><i>As of the close of business on Tuesday, November 17, 2015, MRC has yet to receive a reply to our appeal or a notice of an appeal hearing. MRC is unaware of the District plan to review the appeal on Wednesday, November 18, 2015.</i></p>
<p>[ARTICLE CONTINUES BELOW]</p>	

<p>Meanwhile, a fire district-initiated challenge to Mendocino Redwood’s tree-poisoning operations — commonly called “hack and squirt” — is apparently gaining momentum.</p> <p>About 30 volunteers are now collecting signatures for an ordinance that would proclaim the dead trees a nuisance, said Els Cooperrider, campaign coordinator for Citizens for Fire Safe Forests.</p> <p>The district initiated the ordinance but it has since grown into a countywide measure. Some residents — especially those living in or near forests — became alarmed by the sight of swaths of dead trees in forestland.</p>	<p><i>MRC is aware of the ballot initiative. We are unaware the Albion-Little River Fire District is actively promoting the initiative.</i></p> <p><i>What we do know is in recent months, a public conversation was begun by a group of local residents regarding the practice of treating tan oak in the forest.</i></p>
<p>Ordinance proponents say the trees create an extreme fire hazard, impede fire suppression, pose risks to firefighters and are a health risk to rural residents. The ordinance would prohibit dead trees — depending on size and location — from being left standing for more than 90 days.</p> <p>Mendocino Redwood officials said the dangers of leaving the trees standing are exaggerated. They claim the practice may minimally increase fire danger at first, but over time actually decreases the flammability of the forest.</p> <p>The practice of killing hardwoods is aimed at restoring conifer forests that were altered due to excessive logging by former owners.</p> <p>Killing the tanoaks and other brush gives the commercially valuable conifers a chance to compete for light and water, Mendocino Redwood officials have said.</p> <p>Earlier this year, fire district officials and</p>	<p><i>The treatment of tan oak occurs throughout Mendocino County to restore the redwood and Douglas fir trees across public and private land. Our company, Mendocino Redwood Company (MRC), has been treating tan oak in the forest since we acquired the forestlands in 1998.</i></p> <p><i>MRC’s position is that we already pay for and provide significant company resources toward fire safety. The state’s failure to make good on its promise to reimburse rural counties for fire protection has placed great stress on these largely volunteer organizations. Two things have to happen. First, the Measure M parcel tax must be repealed. We believe it to be unlawful and are beginning a legal process to determine the legality of this tax.</i></p> <p><i>Second, the state of California simply must speed up its reimbursement to rural counties. Mendocino County has sent over \$3 million in SRA fees to Sacramento. Less than \$10,000 has been returned directly to local fire districts. That’s unfair to local fire districts and to MRC.</i></p>

residents brought their concerns to county supervisors, who voted to study the issue before taking action.

Opponents of the practice instead decided to go to voters, Cooperrider said.

Change needs to come “from the bottom up,” she said.

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MRC intends to pay the Measure M taxes under protest and then seek a refund.

Those interested can see crucial and interesting forest operations at their convenience at <http://www.mrc.com/about-us/forestry-videos/>. We post these interesting short videos of activities we undertake in managing the forest and conducting forest science work at MRC. In addition to the videos there is an abundance of information on our company at www.mrc.com. And you can follow our activities on:

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