

# MRC Operating Practices Recertified

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Mendocino Redwood Company has been recertified as operating in compliance with the standards of California's Forest Stewardship Council. The inspection visit to the company's offices and lands took place in mid-August; the report was finalized on November 13. The report was written by employees of the Rainforest Alliance.

MRC was created in July 1998 when Sansome Partners Limited of San Francisco purchased timberlands from Mendocino County timber giant Louisiana Pacific. The holdings included 219,000 acres in Mendocino County, and 9,000 acres in Sonoma County – a total of 228,000 acres, or about 10 percent of the county's area.

The FSC report rejected claims the company is creating a fire hazard by virtue of its tan oak treatment policies. It also rejected claims MRC has stepped up harvesting beyond sustainable levels or that it is, in reality, becoming a tree plantation.

The FSC report praised the company for its capable staff, its wise managerial policy, its willingness to communicate to stakeholders and other community members, and for the good work it has done on its road system.

## **Harvest volumes remain low**

According to information found on the company website, which is current to 2014, timber harvest volume has remained low over the 16 years MRC has been in existence. The company states it has harvested 578 million board feet of timber since 1998: an average of 36 million board feet of timber a year for 16 years.

At the same time, the company has increased its standing timber inventory from 2.1 billion board feet in 1998 to a little more than 3 billion board feet as of 2014. That means that, on average over a 16-year period, it has been harvesting its timber at 1.2 percent of inventory.

Professor Hans Burkhardt and the Forest Advisory Committee of 1989-1992 recommended a percent of inventory harvest of 2 percent per year for industrial timberlands. Therefore, the data indicate MRC is cutting at a rate a little more than half of what Burkhardt and a majority of Forest Advisory Committee members recommended.

This low harvest volume was noted by Rainforest Alliance auditors. "Total harvest volume has remained consistent and substantially below the state-approved sustained harvest levels," the report stated.

John Andersen, an MRC forester based in the company's Fort Bragg office, put these abstract numbers into terms people can understand. "It's like a bank account," Anderson said. "Put in those terms, what we're doing is, not only are we not taking the principal out, we're not even taking out all of the interest. So what we're doing is, we're adding to the principal."

## **Hack and squirt no biggie, report says**

The report also contained findings that negate or minimize concerns MRC is creating a potential fire hazard in its forestlands with its tan oak policy.

The company has treated some 65,000 acres of its forestlands with what it terms “frill treatment,” which policy opponents term “hack and squirt.” Using the treatment, standing, living tan oak trees are cut into with tools, after which an herbicide, often Imazapyr, is applied to the wound. This treatment usually kills the tree within four months, and it often stands for four years before falling to the ground and gradually decomposing.

Citizen activists are currently circulating an initiative petition for a measure on the June 2016 ballot that would declare frilled trees left standing in the forest for more than 90 days, and within 1,000 meters of public infrastructure, are a public nuisance. The measure, if certified for the ballot and then approved, would make the landowner responsible for damages in the event a disaster occurs that can be tied to a private landowner’s tan oak treatment policy.

However, the Rainforest Alliance report states the company’s tan oak treatment policy does not increase fire danger. “Interviews with multiple individuals with decades of fire suppression experience indicated the dead and dying tan oak does not significantly impact the fire hazard,” the report states. “Specific evidence was provided to the auditors by firefighters based on the fire behavior observed in the 2008 fires on MRC lands [the Lightning Complex fires].

“This evidence indicated there was not a notable difference in fire behavior in adjacent stands treated vs. not treated with herbicides, and in some cases the fire was easier to control in the treated lands. The leaves on tan oak contain oils that make even live trees prone to carry fire,” the report states.

The report also contradicted claims the application of the herbicide has endangered the health of the workers applying it, or that a fire in those forestlands will unduly endanger the lives and health of firefighters. “Auditors reviewed MRC chemical use through interviews with personnel, direct observation of sites with herbicide use and review of documentation.

“MRC does not use any chemicals designated by the Forest Stewardship Council as highly hazardous. The chemicals are applied according to the laws and regulations of the state of California, including taking precautions to protect the health of forest workers and the public. Written prescriptions are prepared and site specific precautions are taken to both address worker safety as well as to protect non-target species.

“According to ToxNet Toxicology Data Network, a study conducted to measure the presence of herbicides, including Imazapyr, in the smoke of units treated with herbicides found there was no detection in 140 samples taken from 14 different fires occurring within 40 to 130 days of treatment. Evidence collected demonstrated MRC’s use of herbicides is in conformance with the FSC-US (the Forest Stewardship Council of the United States) standards.” The Rainforest Alliance report commended MRC for its implementation of its policy on roads and watercourses.

“The design and maintenance of the road system were identified as strengths,” the report states. “A significant effort, as well as financial investment, has been made to decommission legacy roads impacting streams. Roads have been relocated to ridges, culverts have been replaced with bridges, and effective drainage structures such as rocked rolling dips have been installed.”

The FSC certification is good through November 2020