

“In defense of the forest: A group of activists organizes direct action against logging in California”, by Noa Cykman was published on the Resilience website on June 5, 2023.

Humboldt Sawmill Company found a number of comments that would benefit from additional correction, clarification or commentary which are presented on the right side of the page in green italics.

Substantial factual information on Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood forests and its practices are available at [www.mendoco.com](http://www.mendoco.com).

<p style="text-align: center;">Text of Article</p> <p><i>Text of article begins below, spaces placed to allow facts to line up with text of article.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><i>Humboldt Sawmill Company Facts, Corrections, Clarifications, and Commentary</i></b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">[ BEGINNING OF ARTICLE BELOW ]</p>	<p><i>Humboldt Redwood Company (HRC) was created in 2008 from lands purchased in Humboldt county with the publicly declared mission to be good stewards of the forest and at the same time run a successful business. We have made significant progress in that regard:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>1. Adopting policies to make HRCs forestlands FSC® (C031337) certified (since 2009);</i></li> <li><i>2. Adding more than <u>1 billion board feet</u> of redwood and Douglas fir trees by lowering the rate of harvest;</i></li> <li><i>3. Defining of old growth down to the level of an individual tree, along with implementation of a policy to protect all individual old growth trees across our property;</i></li> <li><i>4. Elimination of traditional clear cutting from our property;</i></li> <li><i>5. Long term investments to improve habitat for fish across the property by controlling or holding back more than 470,000 cubic yards of sediment (more than 47,000 dump trucks of dirt) from the coastal streams flowing through our forest;</i></li> <li><i>6. Stormproofing approximately 680 miles of forest roads on our ownership.</i></li> <li><i>7. Operating as an open and transparent business; including an open invitation to take interested individuals anywhere in the forest;</i></li> <li><i>8. Completing a substantial rebuild of our Scotia sawmill, assuring that Humboldt</i></li> </ol>

<p style="text-align: center;">[ BEGINNING OF ARTICLE ]</p> <p>Timber Wars</p> <p>A customer entering Home Depot, the largest home improvement retailer in the United States, will find elegant redwood with a certification of “sustainable forestry” available. Humboldt Redwoods Company (HRC) provides this shiny commodity. The company claims to be reducing the use of herbicides, and selecting trees for cutting, rather than “clear-cutting” (general clearing of an area). The agent that creates the concepts and criteria of selection and of sustainability, however, is the company itself. For instance, they commit not to cut “old growth trees,” despite there being no scientific or consensual definition of the age or conditions that would characterize those. Furthermore, they neglect basic precepts of ecology, such as the need for trees of different ages in a healthy forest, as well as the multiple and complex relationships established in the ecosystem. It is evident that private companies, in the context of a capitalist economy and vague environmental legislation, prioritize their profitability above all—which increases with the image of “sustainability.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">[ARTICLE CONTINUES BELOW]</p>	<p><i>County will have infrastructure in the processing of wood products for many years to come; and</i></p> <p>9. <i>Employing more than 300 employees contributing a payroll of more than \$23 million and another \$75 million paid for contractors, supplies and raw material purchases flowing through the local economy</i></p> <p><i>The Forest Stewardship Council® is an international, independent, non-profit organization that promotes responsible forestry, and is supported by many of the leading environmental organizations in the country (see <a href="http://www.fscus.org">www.fscus.org</a>). FSC® Certification is awarded when an independent evaluation of a forest company's practices meets the highest standards for environmentally and socially responsible forestry. Our certification reports are available at <a href="http://www.hrllc.com/Reports-CertificationReports.aspx">www.hrllc.com/Reports-CertificationReports.aspx</a>.</i></p> <p><i>Clearcutting was eliminated from our ownership the day we purchased the land. Instead, we manage the forest on an “unevenaged” basis, retaining and recruiting multiple ages such is found in a natural redwood forest.</i></p> <p><i>The Forest Stewardship Council has definitions for old growth trees. HRC’s policies go further than these definitions by retaining all redwood 48 inches in diameter and all Douglas fir 36 inches in diameter that have been established since 1800. This applies to single trees and groups of trees alike. If a younger or smaller tree is found to have old growth characteristics (large limbs, rounded top, fire scars, etc) then such trees shall be retained as well. Please visit this link for more details on HRC’s old growth policy: <a href="https://www.hrllc.com/old-growth">https://www.hrllc.com/old-growth</a>.</i></p>
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In response to this type of operation, Humboldt County, Northern California, where HRC operates, has a decades-long tradition of activism in defense of the forest, alongside the local Indigenous peoples, and ecologies. The Forest Defenders are self-organized, value direct action, and are determined to intercept all possible logging activity. In a horizontal way, participants decide the next actions and execute them. The activists' tactic involves hindering the company's actions, as well as reducing/zeroing the profit that comes from logging. The longer companies have to wait, whine, and negotiate with activists, the less profitable their activity becomes.

Typical forest defense tactics include tree sitting (activists who make the canopy their home for days, weeks, or months, by the installation of a net among a tree's branches), road blocking (with human bodies or barricades) to prevent the passage of trucks and workers, hanging banners and flags, posing obstacles to the companies' endeavors, and more. Crews of folks go live in remote areas in the forest, monitoring, being the eyes and ears on logging activity for the wider community. As I learned in a workshop of nonviolent direct action at the camp, points of intervention include sites of production, sites of destruction, sites of consumption, sites of decision-making, and unexamined cultural beliefs (e.g. greenwashing). In another front, "tactivities" include collaborating with local Indigenous peoples, and conducting a biological survey of the territory to produce an ecological database.

Losses as well as striking successes mark the history of the group. For example, in 2015, after a summer-long blockade the HRC cancelled 800 to 1000 of thousands of acres of proposed helicopter logging on Long Ridge and upper North Fork of the Mattole River. Blockades in the region again prevented all logging in 2017 and

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*HRC chose not to harvest this acreage as helicopter logging prices made harvesting these acres uneconomical.*

2018. On Rainbow Ridge, abundant intact late seral forest is a reminder and an effect of twenty years of successful direct action. The reason why I could enjoy an uneventful, peaceful afternoon while sitting there on the lookout, with a group, watching the road to spot trucks is because fellow comrades, decades ago, sat on the same spot for the same reason.

#### A week at a forest defense camp

Some forest defenders dedicate their lives entirely to activism, and larger groups sporadically gather in “action camps” for preparation, trainings, planning, and executing actions. In the camp I attended for a week, we led ourselves in a self-organized manner to structure domestic and activist activities. A constant flow of knowledge is shared: there are trainings and workshops on nonviolent direct action (NVDA), tree climbing, reading and interpretation of maps, and whatever else that someone is willing to teach. There were always people reading books or writing in their notebooks, and often someone playing a musical instrument will unfold into a spontaneous jam session.

The aesthetic and political orientation is anarchist, punk, and queer: tattooed, pierced people, free from gender binarism. It is common practice in spaces like this to express the pronouns by which one prefers to be referred to—such as she, he, they, it, or others. The chosen pronouns often break the expectations established by social conventions and point to the social reinvention that is born out of self-determination. In such a context of activism, it is also usual practice to choose fictitious names for the occasion (“camp names” or “forest names”). As in the spirit of “La Casa de Papel,” not knowing the identity of others favors the safety

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*HRC has designated over 43,000 acres as high conservation value forest on its ownership as these acres contribute to the health of water resources and fisheries, old growth characteristics are present, or they encompass rare or threatened ecosystems, including areas on Rainbow Ridge. Typically no management of the forest occurs in these areas although in some cases local experts and stakeholders may be consulted to determine if some management activity would maintain or enhance the existing HCVF.*

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of the group and its members. While some people opt for human names, most have fun with creative names such as “Leaf,” “Stick,” “Raspberry,” “Fennel,” “Saturn,” “Sidewalk,” etc.

Part of the experience of attending a forest defense camp is getting to know the land, spending time with ancestral trees, connecting with the place. While we sat around them, one forest defender shared she heard a tree humming the day before. What are they telling us? One night, we slept under the stars and the trees, feeling their breeze on our faces. We hung our food supplies up on trees’ branches, in case a hungry bear passed by. Forest defenders are masters of survival and of protection. They elaborate logistics, calculate distances, hide bags, mask faces, create names, blur identities, and save forests. “Be mindful of each other, so we can be dangerous together.”

We had a large rustic wooden barn as a base, and groups in action would set out to camp near the forest to be defended. We prepared communal meals, and held lively and humorous meetings daily. Each night, a different person, usually (but not always) among the most experienced, took the initiative to convene the meeting and mediate it. The meetings took place in high spirits and playing with themes like “this is a non-meeting that I’m non-mediating!” The humor is a layer on the surface of deep collective knowledge and years of accumulated experience in group facilitation and processes of decision-making by consensus, which require refined kinds communication, listening, and responsibility.

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An agenda would be proposed for the meeting, and followed in order to arrive at deliberations and concrete plans for the next day, including actions, organization of rides, preparation of meals, etc. This maintained the well-established freedom to do whatever one wants throughout the day—participate in any of the planned activities or none of them. People were sweet, willing, generous, and savvy. Food was delicious. Knowledge was offered freely, and agreements were respected—for example, no cigarettes inside, and quiet time after 11:30pm. All was thoroughly self-organized. “See something, clean something!” It was a relaxed time, as the logging season had not quite started. Other camps may deal with more action and confrontation.

“Sustainable” timber: Who sustains what?

Pacific Lumber, for decades one of California’s largest contractors and known as the “Redwoods Empire,” went bankrupt in 2007, and Humboldt Redwoods Co. is its successor. Pacific Lumber’s downfall was due to decades of extractive forest management. What was fiscally unsustainable also was ecologically unsustainable—they cut so much in such a short time that there was soon nothing left to log. Almost all the regional watershed’s forest has been logged since the 1950s. It was an almost thorough ecocide: 5% remain of the region’s original redwood forests, which use to comprise about 2 million acres. The reason there are still ancient trees in the area is because forest defenders’ efforts protected them. Those logged forests are slowly regrowing, but they are unprotected by law.

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Because many areas are still too young to be harvested, and the timber is of poor quality, HRC has been determined to log on Rainbow Ridge, one of the only areas the company occupies that has profitable timber.

Currently, the two biggest opponents of the forest are HRC, dedicated to the sale of wood, and the electric company PG&E. The electric company struggles to repair its public image after being responsible for causing the massive fires that swept the region in 2021. Its response was to order the cutting of trees that surround the power lines. The answer, in addition to being non-ecological, is of limited effectiveness, compared to alternatives such as burying electrical lines or enhancing equipment protection, considering that most fires are caused by equipment failures.

Both companies seek, as is typical in the capitalist economy, to extract the maximum possible rate of profit from the ecosystem, dispossessing local peoples and ignoring the dense mesh of relationships that make up a living and healthy forest. The Bear River Band, whose ancestral territory includes much of the Mattole watershed, are actively buying back parcels of their land in the Mattole valley after being historically displaced and dispossessed. They are rekindling cultural traditions in the valley and working alongside settlers' NGOs and government agencies on conservation measures

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*From 1995 through 2007, an average of 187 million board feet (MMBF) of timber was harvested annually on the lands now owned by HRC. This harvest ranged from a low of 82.5 MMBF (in 2007) to a high of 295.3 MMBF (1996). HRC has substantially reduced the annual harvest since taking ownership of these forest lands. Annual growth on HRC lands exceeds the annual volume harvested, thus HRC's standing inventory of trees increases each year, to a point 1 billion board feet of redwood and Douglas fir trees has been added to the timber inventory after accounting for volume harvested. HRC periodically conducts a re-inventory of trees and other forest resources on its lands and uses this information as the foundation for long-term harvest plans.*

*HRC has operated with a publicly declared purpose to manage a large block of productive forestland utilizing high standards of environmental stewardship and at the same time to operate as a successful business. HRC's intent is to maintain forestlands for long-term ecological, social, and economic vitality. Stewardship objectives are achieved by maintaining and where possible improving habitat for aquatic and land-based species, protecting old-growth forests and water resources, enhancing forest complexity and biodiversity, and supporting the well being of local communities.*

in the watershed. While the Band has been able to buy other properties, so far Humboldt Redwood Company has not sold timberlands to the Bear River Band. The company went so far as to deny the band access to conduct state-approved biological surveys across their territory.

The context is one of intense tension between activists and the companies committed to logging; a tension that often leads to the arrest of activists and, in some cases, to their physical debilitation or even death. In 1998, a tree was cut down and killed activist David Chain while he resisted the actions of the Pacific Lumber Co., the dominant timber enterprise at the time. According to protesters, the company deliberately cut down huge trees making them fall in a perpendicular manner, to threaten activists. Similarly, in Atlanta, January 18, 2023, Manuel Tortuguita was shot and killed by the police for defending the forest.

#### Futures

Redwoods, present in Northern California, are immense trees that can reach 300 feet in height—the tallest trees on Earth—and live over 2,000 years. Neighboring them, Douglas fir, Madrone, Tanoak, Live Oak, Bay Laurel, and other tree species populate the Matolle Watershed and Rainbow Ridge. In addition to being majestic, they benefit their ecological community in myriad ways, including the preservation of rivers, animal species/biodiversity, and the typical benefits of forests such as carbon sequestration, soil building, moderating the climate, and more.

The effects of deforestation are not restricted to the area in which they occur: the disturbance of vegetation and soils can result in erosion and floods that cause intense and irreversible

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damage to the biome and the habitat of the species that populate it. At this point in time, pressed by climate and ecological crises, the destruction of forests is exponentially murderous. Learning from, and collaborating with, Indigenous peoples, forest defenders, trees, and the multitudes that compose a forest might be essential to finding ways forward.

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*Timber harvesting is regulated by the California Forest Practices Rules which are the most rigorous regulations in the nation when it comes to forest management. CalFire, the Lead Agency on forest regulations, independently reviews and verifies all Timber Harvest Plans (THPs). THPs are considered a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)-equivalent Environmental Review Document. THPs are also reviewed by Regional Water Quality Control Boards and the CA Department of Fish and Wildlife.*

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- 9. Employing more than 300 employees contributing a payroll of more than \$23 million and another \$75 million paid for contractors, supplies and raw material purchases flowing through the local economy.*

*HRC and MRC is regulated by seven (7) state and federal agencies, including CalFire. Additionally, HRC and MRC voluntarily subjects themselves to third part verification of forest practices under the guidelines of the Forest Stewardship Council FSC® (C031337) and has done so since 2009. We publish our inventory and many other details of our forest management on our website. It is straightforward to find information on our management of the forest.*

*From our inception we have encouraged transparency and we have a publicly stated policy of taking anyone to anywhere on the property to see our practices first hand. If you are unable to make the trip you may find videos of our activities in the forest at <https://www.hrcllc.com/videos>*

*Please contact HRC through their website to arrange for a tour. Additionally, we post our inventory and other forest facts on our website. You can find more information at [www.mendoco.com](http://www.mendoco.com)*