

An article titled “ *Albion-Little River Volunteer Fire Department builds community*” was published in the Mendocino Beacon by Michelle Blackwell on November 21, 2018.

Mendocino Redwood 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). Wherever possible we have provided direct links to specific material on our website to help the readers have easy access.

<p style="text-align: center;">Text of Article <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>Facts about Mendocino Redwood Company</i></b></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">[ BEGINNING OF ARTICLE BELOW ]</p>	<p>Mendocino Redwood Company (MRC) was created in 1998 from lands purchased in Mendocino and Sonoma 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:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Adopting policies to make MRCs forestlands FSC certified (since November 2000);</li> <li>2. Adding more than <u>1 billion board</u> feet of redwood and Douglas fir trees by lowering the rate of harvest;</li> <li>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;</li> <li>4. Elimination of traditional clear cutting from our property;</li> <li>5. Long term investments to improve habitat for fish across the property by controlling or holding back more than 1 million cubic yards of sediment (more than 100,000 dump trucks of dirt) from the coastal streams flowing through our forest;</li> <li>6. Removal of more than 36 long time fish barriers, increasing fish bearing streams by more than 20 miles.</li> <li>7. Operating as an open and transparent business; including an open invitation to take interested individuals anywhere in the forest;</li> <li>8. Completing a substantial rebuild of our Ukiah sawmill, assuring that Mendocino County will have infrastructure in the processing of wood products for many years to come; and</li> </ol>

[ BEGINNING OF ARTICLE]

The Albion-Little River Fire Protection District is divided by rivers and ridges, yet stays united in its efforts to provide state of the art service to the people it protects. ALRVFD volunteers provide a complex level of service, including firefighting, water and cliff rescue and medical response. They operate with 24 volunteer men and women including four Emergency Medical Technicians.

Like the other coastal volunteer fire departments, ALRVFD is short of volunteers, running on a shoe string budget and faced with ever increasing demands to meet state training mandates. What sets them apart is their effort to think out of the box on funding and capital investments. ALRVFD passed Measure M in 2014 to increase tax revenue and fund much needed equipment and a place to keep that equipment. Measure M increased taxes on all property and was the first to create a tax on timberland of \$2.50 per acre. The measure passed overwhelmingly and the taxes were collected. Mendocino Redwood Company (MRC) owns a large portion of the timberland and initially did not challenge the measure. Later MRC successfully sued the County and ALRVFD for a refund.

[ARTICLE CONTINUES]

9. Employing over 300 individuals with a payroll of over \$23 million and another \$75 million paid for contractors, supplies, and raw material purchases flowing through the local economy.

The basis of the complaint stems from Health and Safety Code 13811 which defines the types of lands that can be included in districts, including fire protection districts:

*"Territory which has been classified as a state responsibility area may be included in a district, except for commercial forest lands which are timbered lands declared to be in a state responsibility area."* (Emphasis added.)

MRC lands are commercial forests in state responsibility areas. MRC attempted to work with the Albion-Little River Fire Department by appealing this tax to their board. The appeal was denied.

Cal Fire agrees state responsibility areas that are commercial forest lands cannot be part of a district.

If the Albion-Little River Volunteer Fire Department is called by Cal Fire to assist in wildland firefighting efforts they are reimbursed by the state.

Michael Issel, President of the Board of Directors is credited with being the force behind the scenes at ALRVFD. "Without Michael's generosity and devotion in allocating monumental time to progress the fire district's core mission, we would not have three new vehicles or ownership of the downtown station. Michael has treated his board position as a full-time job and then some. We've gone from five funky garages to ownership of what will become a central station, a necessary ingredient for bolstering fire district operations in the years ahead," said Fire chief and County Supervisor elect Ted Williams.

Issel joined the board three and a half years ago. At that time, the department was struggling and unable to pay bills on time, according to Issel. With Issel's help, the board built a better administration and switched to a GAAP standardized accounting system. Issel also sought funding for new equipment through both increased taxes and loans. "Every firetruck is custom built for the geographic and demographic area it serves. When you buy a used truck, you are buying the solution for someone else's area." Issel says. He located a Southern California firm that would give ALRVFD a 20-year lease purchase plan and with that in hand was able to purchase new trucks designed for the ALRVFD region.

Issel laments MRC's apparent change of heart on Measure M and a Sept. 18 Mendocino County Superior Court judgement in their favor. ALRVFD has filed a Notice of Appeal. For their part, MRC insists that state law supports their side of the story.

MRC contends on their web site that their lands are commercial forests in state responsibility areas and therefore cannot be part of a Special District. MRC says they attempted to work with the ALRVFD by appealing this tax to their board.

[ARTICLE CONTINUES]

It became apparent after reviewing the Health and Safety Codes that MRC forestlands were not legally part of the ALRVFD district. It is at that time we brought the issue to the ALRVFD board to appeal the tax. This appeal was denied.

The basis of the complaint stems from Health and Safety Code 13811 which defines the types of lands that can be included in districts, including fire protection districts:

*"Territory which has been classified as a state responsibility area may be included in a district, except for commercial forest lands which are timbered lands declared to be in a state responsibility area."* (Emphasis added.)

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Issel says he does not mind being out in front on this issue or taking on the Fischer Corporation. Fischer Corporation is a San Francisco based company that owns the Gap, Old Navy, MRC and Humboldt Redwood Company. "Our tax dollars are paying for services to protect Fischer Corporate Interests," Issel says. Issel plans to fight MRC in court and in the public forum. If Issel is successful in changing state law, other Special Districts with Fire Departments could also look at taxing timberland.

Still building

Despite the litigation, ALRVFD continues to improve. The fire house tucked behind the Albion Store has always been on a year-to-year lease. Each year the lease renewal was questionable and ALRVFD recently purchased the fire station parcel. The property is large enough to build a station that can accommodate the new equipment and a community center. "This is the first time the community will have a meeting place," Issel says. "Today services are scattered across the ridges." Issel foresees a place for senior services but what he really wants is for the community to step forward and start the conversation. He hopes that a community center will provide ALRVFD with a sense of place.

The opportunity to expand community services does not change ALRVFD's primary purpose. The dedicated volunteers protect an area that is 37.3 square miles. There are 2300 full time residents and an estimated 6500 annual visitors. There are five stations spread throughout the large and diverse district. They own four wildland fire trucks and two structure trucks, plus a host of land and water rescue vehicles and water trucks. Like other coastal districts they also rely on residential water tanks and ponds to extinguish fires. In 2017 they purchased a specialized truck that includes a compressed air foam (CAF) pumper for fire suppression. The foam is essentially soap bubbles and is fully biodegradable. The technology reduces water use from 10,000 gallons on average per structure to 300 gallons per structure. The CAF pumper has been used for every structure fire since it was delivered last December. Williams says "It has worked flawlessly, stretching available scene water for much greater firefighting efficiency. "

[ARTICLE CONTINUES]

MRC lands in the Albion Little River Fire Protection District are "State Responsibility Lands" (SRA). The state has the financial responsibility for wildland fire protection on SRA lands. If the Albion-Little River Volunteer Fire Department is called by Cal Fire to assist in wildland firefighting efforts they are reimbursed by the state.

MRC has supported numerous fire protection districts when requests are received for assistance. This assistance has taken the form of:

- a. Partnering with communities to place dedicated fire-water tanks, improve egress for remote neighbors and coordination of activities with local fire districts.
- b. Working in Sacramento to encourage investment in Mendocino county infrastructure through the return of taxes paid locally and deployment of CalFire resources.

c. Donations of time, equipment and money to Volunteer Fire Departments.

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The all-volunteer fire department responds to an average 220 calls per year. About 68 percent of the calls are medical. ALRVFD volunteers are also tapped for water and cliff rescues. “We work with the Coast Guard on water rescues and cliff incidents. The USCG vessels can’t come close to the shore due to rocks, but their helicopter will fly when other units decline due to weather and darkness. I’m particularly excited about working with Fish and Wildlife. They have a small boat at Noyo and their crew has experience operating in the dark,” Williams says. ALRVFD also sent volunteers to fight fires outside their district on multiple occasions this season, including the currently burning Camp Fire in Butte County.

Williams plans to retain his position as Chief when he is sworn in as County Supervisor. Two assistant chiefs will be tapped to fill the gap when he is on County business. He, like Issel, stresses the need for more community involvement and volunteers. There are two board member openings coming up. There are opportunities to build a vision for the community center and there is always space for more firefighters.

If you are interested in volunteering contact the fire department at 707 937-4022. For more information go to [www.alrfpd.com](http://www.alrfpd.com).

[END OF ARTICLE]

We are working hard to restore the forest we own and set an example for other forest owners, managers and regulators to be good stewards of the forest and at the same time run a successful business. We have made significant progress in that regard:

1. Adopting policies to make MRCs forestlands FSC certified (since November 2000);
2. Adding more than 1 billion board feet of redwood and Douglas fir trees by lowering the rate of harvest;
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;
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