

The article below “The Lumber Man In Charge of Climate Policy” was published in the East Bay Express by Will Parrish on February 11, 2015. Mendocino and Humboldt 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. The company’s comments are mostly limited to forest matters and policies affecting its forestlands.

Substantial factual information on Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood forests and its practices are available at www.mrc.com. Wherever possible we have provided direct links to specific material on our website to help the readers have easy access.

Text of Will Parrish Article	<i>Facts about Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood</i>
<p>The world’s largest remaining contiguous stand of old-growth redwood forest resides in Humboldt Redwoods State Park in Northern California. On the park’s northwestern flank, six people gathered last May to oppose a logging venture on adjacent private property. For four days, the activists shadowed the loggers and their supervising forester, as well as three Humboldt County sheriff’s deputies who were keeping a watchful eye on the forest defenders in case they edged over the park boundary.</p>	
<p>The activists sought to obstruct the logging operation. But initially, the Humboldt Redwood Company (HRC) loggers ignored them, toppling Douglas firs and madrone within thirty feet of where the protesters stood. The supervising forester dispassionately informed them that if any of them died, it would be ruled a suicide. Soon after, a tree crashed against the dead top of a smaller one, sending an errant wood chunk sailing perilously close to an activist’s head.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Activists put themselves and the fallers in an unsafe and potentially dangerous situation by coming up unannounced behind the active logging crew to film the fallers in close proximity. The activists did not inform the timber fallers of their presence on multiple occasions. As soon as the logging contractor saw activists they stopped active logging. Eventually the Sheriff’s Office was called and deputies were dispatched to help ensure everyone’s safety. Active logging operations are hazardous. Even when company employees visit an active logging site, the company stays in constant communication with the logging contractors to ensure everyone’s safety.</i> • <i>The company also requires annual safety training certificates from all logging contractors.</i>
<p>"There was a lot of bravado early on, but after a while, the loggers questioned what they were doing and stopped," recalled the forest activist who goes by the name "Farmer," and whose head was nearly hit by the airborne tree chunk. "They basically said they weren't going to keep working under these conditions [with the protesters present]."</p>	

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<p>HRC crews soon turned to logging a far more remote 800-acre area of the same stretch of forestland, located in the rugged headwaters of the 72-mile-long Mattole River, which flows northwest through Mendocino and Humboldt counties. On their way to work on a late-June morning, loggers crossed over a high mountain pass — the sole access point to an area known as Long Ridge. They were met by an elaborate and fantastical blockade: Under the cover of darkness, activists had lashed together a jumble of logs, forming a wooden contraption reminiscent of a massive woodrat's nest that splayed across the entire roadway.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The “far more remote 800 acre” activity described here was for the construction of a road authorized by appropriate regulators, including the California Department of Fire and Forestry Protection (Cal Fire).</i> • <i>The blockade built by the activists was assessed to be very dangerous by Humboldt Redwood and the local Sherriff, and all logging activity was halted while activists were in the platform.</i>
<p>The logs anchored ropes that were tied to a platform suspended in mid-air above the adjacent canyon. An activist was sitting on the platform, which was secured on the side of the canyon opposite the wood jumble by ropes wrapped to a tree that was clinging to a steep slope. Removing any part of the odd wooden structure would topple this perch. The loggers withdrew, and HRC has not cut in the forest since.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Harvest operations have stopped for the winter period. Humboldt Redwood will give at least 3 months notice to those interested prior to resuming logging and road building operations on these Timber Harvest Plans in the Mattole watershed.</i>
<p>Direct actions that aim to escalate the cost of cutting talismanic forest stands have a long history on California's North Coast. But efforts to protect the Mattole are notable, in part, because of who owns both the forest and the lumber company that has sought to fell it: the Fisher family of San Francisco. Best known as owners of The Gap and Banana Republic retail clothing empire, family matriarch Doris Fisher and her sons Robert, William, and John (who is also well-known in the East Bay as the majority owner of the Oakland A's) are all billionaires. Their collective worth exceeds \$9 billion. Within the Fishers' 440,000 acres of forestland in Humboldt, Mendocino, and Sonoma counties, the family owns more coastal redwood forest than any private entity ever has.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In keeping with the company's forest management policies and FSC Standards pertaining to old growth forests, and after much engagement which included several field visits with members of the Mattole River watershed and other interested parties, Humboldt Redwood has already set aside from harvest the most notable stands in the Mattole. The stands referenced in this article are comprised of a modest percentage of scattered old growth trees (all of which are already being reserved from harvest in accordance with long-standing company policy) along with the remaining forest of trees that have taken hold as a result of natural fire being suppressed in this area over the last 100-150 years.</i> • <i>Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood Companies managed forestlands are operated and certified to the standards of the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC®); the most environmentally rigorous standards of forest management in the world. These standards and associated rules are supported by leading environmental groups in the US and internationally (see www.fscus.org).</i>

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<p>While trees continue to fall in prodigious quantities in California's North Coast and other regions of the state, environmentalists and anti-logging activists have curtailed some logging operations in recent decades by pointing out that forests provide important habitat to numerous species, many of them endangered, including the northern spotted owl. But in the past several years, conservation of these forests has gained new impetus as many scientists have begun to view them through an altogether different lens: as essential tools in the fight against climate change.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>From the moment the Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood Companies came into being, they have sought to operate these forests in a manner that emphasizes environmental stewardship while seeking success as a business. The companies have sought and accepted restrictions, rules, regulations, outside oversight and the constant vigilance of many organizations and interested parties from around the world to enforce extensive and restrictive policies that are in place to protect and improve wildlife habitat across the forests, to protect individual old growth trees, and to harvest timber at a rate that is less than the growth of the forest (thereby sequestering significant additional carbon in the forest each and every year) while providing hundreds of rural, living wage jobs.</i>
<p>As the environmental effects of carbon dioxide emissions have become devastatingly clear, ecologists have started to measure the ability of forests to absorb CO2 — a process known as sequestration. They have found, unsurprisingly, that the world's largest trees — coast redwoods (<i>sequoia sempervirens</i>) — store the most carbon of any living thing on Earth. Douglas firs (<i>pseudotsuga menziesii</i>), such as those that grow in majestic stands in the Mattole watershed, also rate as among the world's most effective trees when it comes to storing greenhouse gases.</p>	
<p>While many environmentalists credit the Fishers' businesses as being more environmentally sensitive than many of their timber industry counterparts, the family still profits by cutting down trees on an enormous scale, thereby diminishing the forests' unique carbon storage capabilities. Given that the Fishers' North Coast properties probably have as much carbon sequestration potential as any forest of equivalent size on the planet, the family is a potential lightning rod in the growing climate change movement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Since the formation of Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood Companies, timber harvesting has been and remains much lower than the rate of growth of the forest. Each year the capacity of these forests to sequester carbon and greenhouse gasses expands. Currently, more than 2 million tons of CO2 is sequestered annually which equals the carbon equivalent of emissions annually of more than 400,000 cars.</i>

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<p>That's especially true given the fact that the eldest Fisher brother, Robert, also serves as co-chair of a little-known cabinet-level body in Sacramento called the California Strategic Growth Council (SGC). Enacted by the state legislature in 2008, the SGC is a cornerstone of Governor Jerry Brown's efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions. The panel has the broad and unprecedented mandate of coordinating implementation of California's climate change prescriptions across all levels of state government, while also preparing the state to accommodate a projected population of 50 million by the year 2050.</p>	
<p>As such, Robert Fisher, whose close relationship with Brown is well-known within the corridors of the state Capitol, is not only in charge of helping set California climate change policy, but he also profits handsomely from harvesting living species that are increasingly being recognized as one of our last best hopes for forestalling the catastrophic impacts of global warming.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Since the formation of Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood Companies, timber harvesting has been and remains much lower than the rate of growth of the forest. Each year the capacity of these forests to sequester carbon and greenhouse gasses expands. Currently, more than 2 million tons of CO2 is sequestered annually which equals the carbon equivalent of emissions annually of more than 400,000 cars.</i>
<p>Until the latter part of the second millennium, giant redwood stands stretched from southwestern Oregon to Monterey Bay. Large groves of Douglas fir were also commonplace. All were a product of the region's moderate temperatures and plentiful rainfall, and also helped produce our climate.</p>	

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<p>Before the advent of logging, Northern California and the Pacific Northwest housed an "unprecedented carbon budget," according to Jerry Franklin, a University of Washington professor of ecosystem analysis who is known as "the father of old-growth research." As Franklin explained at a conference sponsored by the Pacific Forest Trust in Arcata this past August, the conifer-dominated "Pacific temperate rainforest," which runs from Prince William Sound in Alaska through the British Columbia Coast to California's Central Coast, contains the largest mass of living and decaying material of any ecosystem in the world. Redwood forests, he noted, exceed the capacity of any on Earth to store carbon "by a factor of three or four." The mixed Douglas fir and hardwood forests that grow adjacent to the redwoods, as well as the montane-mixed conifer ecosystems of the Cascades and Sierra mountain ranges, among other forests of the so-called "Pacific slopes," also play a notable role in regulating atmospheric carbon.</p>	
<p>"What we have is a region full of superlatives, with the redwood piled on the top of them," Franklin said at the conference. "In the North Pacific coastal regions, which run from the Bay Area all the way up to the Gulf of Alaska, are numerous moist forests with an extraordinary capacity to sequester carbon, capable of making a real difference globally when it comes to climate change."</p>	
<p>When European Americans arrived on the West Coast in the late 1700s and early 1800s, they quickly sought to capitalize on the enormous forests stretching around them. The government seized lands from native peoples without compensation, converting them to private property through giveaways and auctions, often to fraudulent buyers. As the Bay Area expanded, loggers vacuumed old-growth trees out of the region's forestlands, furnishing high-value timber to markets around the globe.</p>	

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<p>By the 1980s, large timber corporations, such as Maxxam and Louisiana Pacific, had initiated one of the most intense logging waves that California's North Coast had ever known. But they were opposed by ecologists who had moved into the area during the previous twenty years and who believe fervently in a forest's inherent right to exist, as well as by some loggers who recognized that their jobs were threatened by the liquidation of the large forests that still remained. In addition, scientists had developed new ways of measuring the forests' societal and ecological worth. Professor Franklin's research, for example, helped reveal the ecological importance of old-growth redwoods to numerous critters — including the spotted owl.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood's old growth protection policies were formed in part based on research and discussion with Dr. Franklin going back to the 1990's.</i> • <i>Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood's harvesting operations are subject to the oversight of nine separate federal and state regulatory agencies, and comply with the standards and rules associated with Forest Stewardship Council certification (voluntary independent third party assessment and validation of exemplary environmental forest management practices).</i> • <i>California's forest harvest laws and regulations are the toughest regulatory environmental standards for forest management in the country.</i> • <i>Forest Stewardship Council certification is recognized as the most rigorous voluntary independent standard for exemplary forest management, and is supported by a variety of local, regional, national and international environmental organization. From time to time, there are additional requirements outsiders seek to impose to further control and oversee the company's operations to assure faithful compliance to all of these rules and restrictions.</i> • <i>When activist organizations show up as the groups in this story did, our approach is to provide for their safety, as well as for those workers who may be put at risk by the activist presence.</i>
<p>In the Eighties and Nineties, logging companies were met with various forms of resistance, including lawsuits and fantastical direct actions similar to the 2014 Mattole Forest blockade. By the late Nineties, protests in remote logging towns were attracting thousands of people rather than dozens, and the music at the protests was being performed by members of the Grateful Dead rather than by local dudes with guitars. Eventually, nearly all of the remaining old-growth redwoods — a mere 3 percent of California's original total — were protected by parks and conservation easements. The other 97 percent, however, were collectively more degraded than they had ever been.</p>	

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<p>The timber industry has traditionally viewed forests in terms of "board feet," the unit of measurement that represents a forest's potential financial value in lumber. When the Fishers purchased Louisiana Pacific's 232,500 acres of forestlands in Mendocino and Sonoma counties in 1998, the board foot volume of the heavily cut-over property averaged a paltry 10,000 per acre. By contrast, at the time of Euro American settlement, the board foot volume of the same forests averaged 125,000 to 150,000 per acre, according to estimates by biologists, with exceptional stands containing more than 1 million per acre (enough to build roughly fifty five-room houses).</p>	
<p>Patrick Gonzalez, who is a National Park Service climate change scientist and a visiting scholar at UC Berkeley's Center for Forestry, is one of the world's leading experts on carbon sequestration. He notes the importance of studying remaining old-growth forests to establish a benchmark for how much carbon the degraded lands could store in the future. "Published field research shows that old-growth coast redwoods in Humboldt Redwoods State Park attain the highest carbon densities (tons of carbon per hectare) of any ecosystem in the world," Gonzales wrote to me in an email, referring to the forest directly adjacent to the Mattole Forest (of which the Fisher family owns roughly 8,000 acres in total). "They achieve such high densities because they attain the tallest heights of any tree in the world."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Humboldt Redwood agrees that density is important as a carbon sink. Similar soil conditions on company lands that contain plantations of pure redwood have been measured by the company and University of California researchers under Dr. Kevin O'Hara. The research shows that Humboldt Redwood's managed forests are among the fastest carbon sequestering forests in the world.</i>
<p>Gonzales is an advisor to the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). He also helped lead an effort sponsored by the California Air Resources Board to inventory the carbon in all of California's ecosystems, and to estimate their changes over time, thus providing a scientific foundation for the role of forests in meeting the greenhouse gas reduction goals of the 2006 California Global Warming Solutions Act (AB 32).</p>	

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<p>The Fisher family's fortune originated in real estate. In the Fifties and Sixties, family patriarch Donald Fisher bought and refurbished old hotels throughout California. His son John Fisher is currently the majority owner of the Fairmont Hotels of San Francisco and San Jose, and the family has numerous other real estate holdings. Reflecting the enormous financial success the family has enjoyed, UC Berkeley's real estate institute, the Fisher Center for Real Estate & Urban Economics, is endowed in their name.</p>	
<p>The Fishers are also extremely influential and politically active, but their ties to the Brown administration, in particular, are evident in numerous ways. For example, Anne Gust Brown, the governor's wife, served as general counsel, chief administrative officer, and executive vice president of The Gap during her fourteen years with the retailer. Her boss was Robert Fisher, The Gap's former president and CEO.</p>	
<p>One of Governor Brown's main priorities last fall was the passage of Proposition 1, the \$7.5 billion state water bond that voters approved in November. According to Secretary of State data, the biggest donor to Yes on Prop 1 was the Jerry Brown for Governor 2014 campaign, which gave just shy of \$5.2 million. Collectively, the Fisher family was the campaign's second biggest pool of financial support. They contributed more than \$1.5 million, with Robert Fisher personally chipping in \$400,000.</p>	
<p>California has arguably taken stronger legislative steps to address climate change than any state in the union. AB 32 mandates that the state reduce carbon dioxide emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. California is also the first state to inaugurate a cap-and-trade program, which allows polluters to cancel out their emissions by buying carbon emission reductions somewhere else on a commodities exchange. A portion of those credits, or offsets, comes from carbon sequestration in forests.</p>	
<p>But according to many environmentalists, the cap-and-trade program is fraught with problems, some of the most glaring of which are its provisions concerning forests. For example, cap and trade currently allows timber operators to generate carbon credits even when they clear-cut a forest, so long as the cut is no larger than forty acres.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Traditional clear-cutting was eliminated as a harvesting method soon after the formation of each company; Mendocino Redwood Company in 1998, and Humboldt Redwood Company in 2008.</i>

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<p>Meanwhile, Brown has used revenues from the cap-and-trade program as a key funding source for his favored projects, one of which is the Strategic Growth Council (SGC) — financed by \$130 million in annual cap-and-trade revenue. Sacramento State University political science instructor Peter Detwiler, who worked in the first Brown administration's Office of Planning and Budget (under which the SGC is now housed), noted in an interview that the SGC is distinct from what he called "picket-fence politics" — the tendency for state agencies to be divided by functions, such that they rarely collaborate with one another to pursue larger policy objectives.</p>	
<p>The SGC, by contrast, coordinates among all the state's major agencies. The Sacramento politics journal Capitol Weekly noted in October 2014 that the "SGC reflects Brown's vision as much as any entity in government."</p>	
<p>On the SGC, Robert Fisher sits alongside secretaries from California's primary state agencies, including the California Business Consumer Services and Housing Agency and the California Environmental Protection Agency. Fisher was originally appointed to the SGC by then-Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2009, but then was reappointed by Brown in 2013. SGC Executive Director Michael McCoy, a former UC Davis professor of urban planning who carries out the day-to-day work of the council, said in an interview that Fisher's contributions "have been nothing short of fantastic. He's brought great insight into so many areas of our work, such as our efforts to promote greater infill development in cities. And he brings an outsider's perspective that, frankly, nobody who's been working inside of government for a very long time can offer."</p>	
<p>In the coming years, carbon sequestration will become a larger focus of California climate change policy. In 2016, the California Natural Resources Agency is set to unveil its "Forest Carbon Plan," which will set clearer proposals for storing carbon in trees — a plan likely to be profoundly shaped by the timber industry. McCoy said the SGC will be "coordinating more closely" with state agencies to promote carbon sequestration by that point.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Company foresters, along with hundreds of other stakeholders, participated in the public process of developing carbon standards in association with AB 32.</i>

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<p>However, according to the best available information, existing state policy has not led to more carbon storage in forests. A California Air Resources Board study led by UC Berkeley Forestry Professor John Battles and released last year shows that the amount of carbon sequestered on California's forests and other ecosystems declined by nearly 4 percent from 2001 to 2008.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It has since come to light that Professor Battles study focused on all wild lands of California which included vast expanses of fire prone Chaparral brush lands in Southern California. Many believe that further study of true forestlands in California will show that industrial forests are the greatest carbon sequesters in the state.</i>
<p>When the Fishers started gobbling up the North Coast's timberlands in 1998, many onlookers were mystified. At the time, the trendline for timber real estate was aiming in a single direction: down. The Timber Wars between loggers and environmentalists were still roiling. And the Fishers were already being stung by a wave of bad publicity regarding The Gap's use of sweatshop labor, which made them a target of burgeoning campaigns against corporate globalization.</p>	
<p>At first, many anti-logging activists mounted opposition to the Fisher family's actions. But by the early part of the last decade, the vast majority of picture-postcard old-growth groves were already gone or protected, so the effort to preserve forests soon faded from broader consciousness. "It's hard to rally people around a slogan like 'Save the Second-Growth!'" said longtime environmental activist Karen Pickett of Berkeley, who is coordinator of the group Bay Area Coalition for Headwaters. "And some people latched onto the good-sounding PR, which is what The Gap specializes in. People wanted to believe the Fishers would do better, but, in fact, the profit motive drove their business model."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood believe that the extensive, rigorous and restrictive policies adopted and implemented by MRC in the late 1990s that included reduced levels of harvest, elimination of traditional clear-cutting, protection of old growth down to the level of an individual tree, aquatic and terrestrial habitat restoration, along with open and transparent communication with all interested stakeholders, supported its achievement of FSC certification.</i>

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<p>The main shepherd of the Fishers' timber investment was Robert Fisher's brother, John Fisher, majority owner of the A's. (As an October 2014 article in Mendocino County's iconoclastic Anderson Valley Advertiser newspaper put it: "If a tree falls on the Mendocino Coast, will the Oakland A's be able to afford a high-priced free agent?") Sandy Dean, a Fisher-family friend and partner of John Fisher in the family's investment arm, Sansome Partners, is chairman of both HRC and the Mendocino Redwood Company (MRC), which are virtually identical companies that encompass the Fishers' timber holdings in each county. The companies' chief forester is perhaps the industry's most renowned expert on running a profitable logging operation without relying on large-scale clear-cutting: Mike Jani, who is also the president of MRC/HRC.</p>	
<p>"From the beginning, we committed to demonstrating that it is possible to manage productive timberlands with a high standard of stewardship," Jani said in an interview. In referring to the companies' logging practices, he cited a reduced harvest rate, elimination of traditional clear-cutting, preservation of old-growth trees, and investment in road improvements to reduce erosion into streams, which despoils fish habitat. In an email, Dean wrote that the companies have "improved the forest management policies on our lands in material ways," and then cited a similar list of improvements.</p>	
<p>Indeed, MRC/HRC executives have skillfully crafted a reputation of the companies being a sustainable logging operation. The companies' products are touted by Home Depot in television ads throughout the Bay Area as "certified sustainable Mendocino Redwood Company lumber." This marketing campaign rests largely on the imprimatur of the nonprofit Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), which evaluates and certifies timber operators from California to the Congo as responsible forest stewards based on a series of standards for managing and harvesting land. The FSC grants its logo to forests in eighty countries on five continents, including to MRC/HRC. Jani was an FSC director for six years while simultaneously serving as MRC/HRC's chief forester.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood Company's forest management is based on the best available science and corresponding ecological information, which is broadly shared with the public on the company's website (see www.mrc.com).</i> • <i>The FSC-US board is elected by the membership to develop and revise standards and policies for the US region, as well as to provide technical guidance to US stakeholders, and to be a liaison with the FSC international board to address region-wide issues. Certification decisions are made solely by the third party certification bodies independent of any interaction with the FSC-US board. Audit reports are shared with the public, and for MRC and HRC are available at http://www.mrc.com/plans-reports/certification-reports/ or info.fsc.org.</i>

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<p>FSC certification is based on exceeding the requirements of state regulations to maintain certain areas of forest based on their value to the environment. According to figures in MRC's Habitat Conservation Plan filed with regulatory agencies, by 2045, the company intends to increase the board-foot volume level in its forests from 10,000 to 20,000 per acre, the latter of which equates to the volume of a young second- or third-growth redwood or fir forest. Company reps highlight the timber volume increase, as well as a policy that prohibits cutting of old-growth forests, as an example of how it goes beyond state requirements.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>FSC certification criteria are based on national standards developed in accordance with broader international Principles and Criteria of the FSC-Int. FSC certification audits at Humboldt and Mendocino Redwood are conducted annually by two separate third party auditors: Scientific Certification Systems and Rainforest Alliance.</i> • <i>Mendocino Redwood Company's Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) is a draft document (over 1600 pages) and work in progress since 2001 (see http://calfire.ca.gov/resource_mgt/resource_mgt_EPRP_PTEIR_MendocinoRedwoodCo.php). The HCP is a long term planning agreement with a consortium of regulatory agencies that takes a landscape level approach to exceeding regulatory forest management requirements in exchange for more efficient interaction with regulators. A public draft was released in late 2012, with expectations of a final approved version in early 2016.</i>
<p>But critics of the company say it gains more in image than it loses in revenue through its limits on cutting old growth. The company's policy protects un-harvested old growth stands, as well as old-growth trees in previously harvested stands. It also protects individual old-growth trees (hardwoods and conifers). It defines old-growth by girth (36-inch diameter for a Doug fir, for instance), age (established before 1800), and other structural characteristics. But based on these definitions, only 105 acres of MRC lands are currently off-limits to logging (just 0.046 percent of the Fishers' total holdings in the county).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Outside of the 6,000 acres of old growth reserve at Humboldt Redwood, the remaining forestlands managed by Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood Company contain almost no un-entered stands of old growth forest due to harvest prior to the company's Existence.</i> • <i>Mendocino Redwood Company was the first company in California to define old growth to the level of an individual tree and both companies protect all trees meeting its ecologically based definition of old growth (see http://www.mrc.com/key-policies/old-growth/).</i>
<p>Moreover, MRC's pledge to double timber volume from 10,000 board feet per acre during nearly half a century is unimpressive when considering that timber volumes on these lands were at an all-time low when the company purchased them. If the company were truly interested in restoring forests, it would at least leave the remainder of its healthiest forests intact rather than cutting them, critics say. Instead, MRC has dramatically reduced timber volumes in the areas of Mendocino and Humboldt Counties in which its forests are in the best shape.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood measure timber volume by watershed analysis across the property. The best analysis available indicates that all watersheds have experienced growth in total standing timber volumes since the formation of the companies. Inventory volumes for both Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood are shared and available on the company's website http://www.mrc.com/monitoring/forest-inventory/.</i>

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<p>One of these areas surrounds the small coastal town of Albion. Nobody in Mendocino County has conducted more in-depth reviews of logging plans than Albion resident Linda Perkins, who chairs the Albion River Watershed Protection Association. When MRC purchased 15,000 acres in the watershed, the land averaged 26,000 board feet per acre. The company is reducing that total to 18,000 per acre, as part of a goal of evening out forest sizes across its properties. "MRC claims credit for the high timber volumes [in the Albion], but they're continuing to take the forest down," Perkins noted. "Their goal is to make the forest more homogeneous. When you do that, and you don't have much timber, you have to take the big trees."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Timber volumes across the Albion watershed have increased by more than 50 million board feet since the formation of Mendocino Redwood in 1998.</i>
<p>According to numerous sources, Jani frequently lobbies regulatory agencies and legislators to prevent restrictions on the company's ability to harvest timber. Recently, he has strongly opposed a proposal by the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board to reduce tree felling on the company's properties in the Elk River watershed of Humboldt County. The proposal was designed to prevent flash-flooding in the region. Flooding is a legacy of over-logging, which has reduced the soil's ability to retain moisture and has destroyed numerous properties in the area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Redwood forests on the North Coast were managed in a short sighted manner for most of the last 150 years. Prior practices left a host of legacy environmental issues to be addressed. Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood continue to manage these forests to harvest some timber, provide rural, living wage jobs, support the infrastructure of the business, and to improve the health of the forests for the long term.</i> • <i>Humboldt Redwood had a recent difference of scientific opinion with the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board and remains in dialogue with the agency about the best way to address downstream flooding issues.</i>
<p>In 2006, the California State Legislature considered a bill called the Heritage Tree Preservation Act, which would have outlawed the cutting of any "heritage tree," a category based on a tree's type, size, and age. For example, the legislation would have prohibited cutting any tree older than 150 years. Representatives of Mendocino Redwood Company were among those who opposed the bill in Sacramento.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood prefer a more ecologically based approach to old growth trees (see http://www.mrc.com/key-policies/old-growth/). Mendocino Redwood opposed the Heritage Tree bill because company experts felt that this approach could create an incentive for landowners to cut trees down as they come close to reaching the age of 150 years.</i>
<p>"Since they were in FSC, they argued they had taken care of any considerations about old-growth preservation," said Dan Hamburg in a 2012 interview with me, referring to MRC/HRC officials. Hamburg is a current Mendocino County supervisor and former US Congressman who lobbied for the Heritage Tree Preservation Act. "They were doing it on their own, so the bill wasn't necessary — that was the argument."</p>	

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<p>The biggest flashpoint for renewed criticism of the Fishers' logging plans, however, is HRC's proposal for the Mattole Forest. The Mattole River, one of the country's few remaining undammed major rivers, meets the Pacific Ocean at the westernmost point of the continental United States, in the small town of Petrolia, located along the largest swath of undeveloped coastline in the nation. The town records an average annual rainfall of more than 100 inches. Everything about the place is unique, including the HRC logging plan for the area. It calls for establishing the largest late-successional (a term for nearly-old-growth) timber harvest in Humboldt County in at least sixteen years. HRC is also attempting to log areas that include steep slopes, which the notorious cut-and-run corporation Maxxam had failed to reach — a fact that is deeply painful for residents who fought off those plans in the late Nineties and early Aughts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The harvest plan articulates that the proposed timber harvest will preserve the late-successional forest, and will also provide the benefit of reducing fuel loading in this area.</i> • <i>Mattole harvest prescriptions are the most restrictive of all prescriptions on Humboldt lands.</i> • <i>Maxxam failed to meet a regulatory obligation to complete Watershed Analysis (WA) preventing them from operating in the Mattole. When Mendocino Redwood purchased the property out of Maxxam's bankruptcy, the company committed to completing the overdue watershed analyses and has done so. The watershed analysis process included public participation, meetings with neighbors and field visits. All harvesting in the Mattole is governed by the restrictions/prescriptions produced by the regulatory required Watershed Analysis (see http://www.mrc.com/plans-reports/watershed-analysis/).</i>
<p>Because of the activists' blockade last year, HRC management has put its plans for the Mattole on hold for the time being. Company reps have even been talking with environmental groups about altering some aspects of the plan. According to Jani, however, the company is unlikely to change its original plans significantly, because that would mean re-filing the proposal with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.</p>	
<p>In the past year, MRC also raised alarms among many environmentalists when it released logging plans far larger in scope than it had in the past. The company submitted several timber-harvest plans that ranged from 700 to 1,450 acres. Jani said, however, that despite the big plans, "the harvesting methods we made commitments to follow right from the beginning haven't changed at all."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Some of Mendocino Redwood Company's neighbors and interested members of the community have asked for timber harvest planning to take place across bigger landscapes as opposed to smaller discrete planning areas so that a broader ecological view can be employed in formulating the plans. This has resulted in the company sometimes using bigger planning areas for harvesting, while still covering about the same number of acres per year for overall harvest.</i>
<p>In November, Jani and other MRC/HRC foresters led local residents on a tour of one of these logging plans, in Albion, where the Fishers plan to remove roughly 45 percent of the timber across 758 acres during the next two years. The interactions between company leadership and locals spoke volumes about the gap between California policies designed to reduce carbon emissions and the way residents struggle to protect land near their homes.</p>	

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<p>Albion volunteer Fire Chief Ted Williams, who makes a living writing software for Intel, is by no means a radical. As the father of a young child, however, he is concerned about climate change, and particularly the increased wildfire it portends for his family's rural homebase. By removing the forest canopy provided by older trees and thereby generating lots of young tree growth, timber harvests like the one in Albion create drier conditions in forests, and thus a greater likelihood of catastrophic wildfires. The company's practice of spraying roughly 4,000 pounds a year of the herbicide Imazapyr, targeting tan oak trees, which are not as marketable as redwoods and firs, likely also increases the fire danger, if only by leaving swaths of standing dead trees.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mendocino Redwood staff has since met with Chief Williams and has adopted some of his suggestions for slash treatment, fuel break construction and upgrades. These are documented in a letter to members of the public (see http://www.hrcllc.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Albion-Community-Agreement.pdf).</i> • <i>Herbicides have been used to address legacy forest conditions from harvests predating the formation of MRC. When used, herbicides are applied in a contained manner to individual trees in an effort to restore the redwood and Douglas Fir forest. The forester developing the plan proposed to manage the plan area without the use of herbicides.</i>
<p>Climate change forecasters also predict an increase in dry-lightning strikes. A series of 2008 lightning-caused fires in Mendocino County burned a total of 54,817 acres, of which an astounding 23,196 (42 percent) were on MRC land, according to information from MRC foresters.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mendocino Redwood lands were among the most remote and lowest priority fires for all state firefighting resources following a rare and substantial lightning storm in 2008. Appropriately, state resources were focused on human safety first, homes second and timberlands third. On this basis, Mendocino Redwood felt it was entirely expected that its lands would have greater burns than would otherwise have occurred.</i>

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<p>According to a video made of MRC's tour with local residents, when Williams told MRC Vice President Dennis Thibeault that "you should not cut 758 acres," Thibeault responded by saying, "Unfortunately, as a company, we're still here. What you're asking us to do is go away. That's not a solution for us." In the same conversation, Thibeault said, "It is a little bit of a stretch to say we have a precarious climate right now. Just two years ago — how much rain did we get? Three years ago, we filled every reservoir in California — in one winter." When I attempted to reach Robert Fisher or one of his representatives for comment on the apparent conflict between profiting from logging and helping lead the state's climate policy, I received an email from MRC/HRC Chairman Dean. "Our forest businesses, of which Bob Fisher is an investor, have worked to be good stewards of the land and also to be a successful business." He continued, "We have worked hard to balance improving the ecological health of our forest and operating as a successful business, and these goals to us are consistent with the broader mission of the Strategic Growth Council." Governor Brown's office did not respond to a request for comment for this report.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>There are 758 acres within the Albion timber harvest plan boundaries. Of that 758 acres, approximately 185 acres are designated no harvest zones, and another 225 acres are significantly restricted harvest due to adjacent watercourses.</i> • <i>Since the formation of Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood Companies, timber harvesting has been and remains much lower than the rate of growth of the forest. Each year the capacity of these forests to sequester carbon and greenhouse gasses expands. Currently, more than 2 million tons of CO2 is sequestered annually which equals the carbon equivalent of emissions annually of more than 400,000 cars.</i> • <i>Lumber produced from California forests is the result of the highest environmental standards of any commercial forests in the United States. California consumes more lumber than it produces. Incremental reductions in California timber harvests lead to increased imports of lumber from states/areas (notably Oregon, Washington and sometimes Canada) whose forest environmental standards are lower than the standards employed in California.</i>
<p>As with MRC/HRC, environmental organizations often point out that the Forest Stewardship Council is better than existing alternatives. Representatives of Greenpeace International, the Sierra Club, and the World Wildlife Fund participate in the FSC's governance, although the timber industry itself has far more influence within the organization's power structure. Of late, Greenpeace has been increasingly critical of FSC decisions to certify companies that carry out large-scale deforestation and clear-cutting. The FSC is only a standard-setting organization, though, meaning its personnel do not actually conduct the certification reviews — rather, it farms out that function to other organizations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The FSC is made up of three chambers – Social, Economic and Environmental. Each chamber holds one-third of the weight in votes, ensuring that influence is shared equally over the chambers.</i> • <i>Certifying bodies are accredited by Accreditation Services International (ASI).</i>

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<p>The company that certifies HRC on the FSC's behalf is Scientific Certification Systems (SCS), or SCS Global Services, which operates from an office complex at 2000 Powell Street in Emeryville. In 2013, SCS Global Services received stinging criticism for granting FSC certification to Green Diamond Resources Company, a timber firm that is nearly as large as MRC/HRC and owns about 400,000 acres of California forestland. Green Diamond relies heavily on so-called "even-aged management," an industry euphemism that refers to clear-cutting.</p>	
<p>SCS Global Services President Robert J. Hrubes wrote a seven-page letter entitled "Even-Aged Management, Forest Stewardship Council, and Green Diamond Resources Company" in 2013 that surprised many environmentalists for its frankness. Hrubes defended his company's FSC certification by noting that there is nothing unusual about FSC approval of a corporation that conducts large-scale clear-cuts. There are, he noted, already "many millions of hectares of FSC-certified forestland around the world (likely more than half of the total FSC-certified land area) on which even-aged management (and 'clear cutting') is employed, both in operations classed as plantation forest management and operations classed as natural forest management."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood eliminated traditional clear-cutting soon after formation of each of the businesses.</i>
<p>In explaining the fundamental problem of the Fishers' management of such an enormous amount of forest, activists and loggers alike often say things such as, "The Fishers are running a business up here, not a charity." So, too, is MRC/HRC's sustainability certifier, the Forest Stewardship Council, a business that focuses on marketing its brand. Richard Donovan, a founding FSC member and senior vice president of the Rainforest Alliance, notes in an essay on the FSC website that the organization's function is "to drive market demand."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Historic harvesting has left a variety of legacy issues, such as thousands of miles of road restoration work needed, terrestrial and aquatic habitat issues, inadequate fish barriers and more. Mendocino and Humboldt Redwood continue to work to address legacy forest management issues over the long term and this work is facilitated by the harvesting that occurs on these forests. See restoration work on the company's website http://www.hrcllc.com/key-policies/forest-and-road-restoration/.</i>
<p>"FSC International must become a top-notch business — the FSC system is a market-oriented mechanism," he writes, "and it needs a professional staff focused on operating at a business level."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>These comments were made in the context of Richard Donovan wanting to find a way for the FSC to move beyond its long standing dependence on philanthropy and to become economically self-sustaining to ensure the FSC system (the most environmentally rigorous standard for forestry management in the world) will be around in 10 to 20 years and beyond.</i>

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<p>Among other things, environmentalists have criticized the FSC for not requiring that the companies it certifies account for climate change. "There's nothing in our standards that officially accounts for climate change," FSC Communications Director Brad Kahn acknowledged to me. "At this point, our perspective is that good forest management is the foundation for any robust forest carbon credits." Likewise, MRC/HRC does not yet have any policies that account for its forests' link to global warming.</p>	
<p>Various efforts to do better than either the FSC or the Fisher family's logging operations have emerged in recent years, including the nonprofit Redwood Forest Foundation, which manages 50,000 acres on the Mendocino Coast, a little south of the Mattole. Some argue that the fundamental issue is the existence of timber barons such as the Fishers — outside entities that dominate the region's private lands from afar.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Our information is that the Redwood Forest Foundation is seeking FSC certification of its forest.</i>
<p>While the efforts to save "late seral" forests or restore second-growth are not as glamorous as the campaigns to protect remaining old-growth that came to a head twenty years ago, activists say current forest protection campaigns — especially when considering the impacts of climate change — are at least as important as those that occurred before. Longtime Mattole resident Gabrielle Ward has worked to protect her area's forest since the mid-1980s. Unfortunately, she said, California policy has come nowhere close to catching up with the imperative to restore forests.</p>	
<p>"The Mattole Douglas-fir forest is exceptionally rare and deserves to be protected in its own right," she said. "And this forest type may have the ability to sequester more carbon than any other on earth besides redwood. We have a tremendous capacity to capture carbon, not only by retaining the forests we've got, but by helping the ones that have been cut over to recover."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Humboldt Redwood recently set aside an important newly identified High Conservation Value area in the Mattole which includes an old growth stand. HRC will continue to follow its state, federally and FSC approved old growth policy in the Mattole and throughout the property that protects individual old growth trees. The company is also employing additional protection measures throughout the remainder of the Mattole in order to enhance and further protect this forest.</i>