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FOREST SERVICE CAVES IN TO INDUSTRY PRESSURE AND BOOSTS LOGGING EVEN FURTHER ON STANISLAUS FOREST!

Stanislaus National Forest officials today just released their new plan for logging on the Stanislaus National Forest. CSERC staff has not yet seen the just-released documents, but a reporter who has said the new plan calls for raising the Stanislaus annual logging level to 25 million board feet in 2007, 30 million in 2008, and 38 million board feet after that time. If you compare that to the 10-12 million board feet of sawlogs that the Stanislaus produced over the past three years, you can see the new logging plan is going to increase logging three to four times the recent level.

"It is obviously no coincidence that Stanislaus Forest officials waited until after their big "Forest Service Centennial" celebration in Sonora this past weekend to reveal their new plan for boosting logging on the local national forest," said John Buckley, executive director for the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center (CSERC). CSERC has been the long-time environmental watchdog for the Stanislaus Forest and CSERC staff had worked closely with the Forest Service and other members of the community to attempt to find agreement on a balanced, compromise timber target. Instead, Forest staff members have openly admitted that the new logging level chosen is higher than the Forest would have selected if there hadn't been strong political pressure from the timber industry. Forest employees have repeatedly shared with CSERC the internal news that political pressure almost cost Tom Quinn, Forest Supervisor, his job earlier this year.

Buckley pointed out, "When pro-logging politicians such as Congressman George Radanovich make it a priority to pressure the Forest Service to boost logging levels, you have to give those politicians credit.

They've proven once again that timber production is far more important to Congress and the current Administration than watershed protection, wildlife, recreation, and other values that most Americans favor. The fact that logging consistently loses money on national forest lands is apparently not important to either the Forest Service or to politicians who favor the timber industry. The bottom line for them appears to be getting out a high level of sawlogs and ensuring that the timber industry gets higher profits."

For many years, CSERC staff scientists and Buckley (who was a longtime Forest Service firefighter) have denounced timber industry claims that higher logging levels result in fire-proof forests. "In reality," says Buckley, "removing the trunks of trees from the forest does little or nothing to reduce wildfire risk. Instead, it is the small, flammable trees (too small to be sawlogs), along with brush, groundcovers, logging slash, and other surface fuels that make the forests ripe for catastrophic wildfires. Logging more sawlog-size trees won't make the forests safer from fire, but cutting up to 38 million board feet each year on the Stanislaus Forest will definitely harm watershed values, degrade water

quality, and degrade wildlife habitat. It will also reduce scenic values for recreation and tourism."

Buckley also noted, "This new logging plan is especially disappointing because Stanislaus Forest Supervisor Tom Quinn publicly announced at a meeting back in August that it appeared that 25 million board feet a year would be as high as the Stanislaus Forest could go with logging.

Yet with all the political pressure brought to bear on him, it is understandable that he had no choice but to greatly increase that timber target. He had to choose the higher level, because the timber industry wanted 40 million board feet. The Forest isn't jumping to that level immediately because it doesn't have the staff to suddenly produce that much volume, but if the plan moves forward as announced, the Stanislaus Forest will be producing close to 40 million board feet in just a few years -- exactly what the timber industry ordered."

Although two SPI sawmills experienced layoffs earlier this year due to what SPI officials claimed was insufficient wood coming to their mills, the company has recently successfully bid on and bought giant fire salvage sales from national forest lands to the north of the Stanislaus Forest. That huge volume of fire salvage wood already assured the SPI mills of having adequate wood for the next two years. This latest plan released by the Forest Service will clearly add significantly to that volume and assure SPI of increased profits at the same time that environmentalists are counting this as just the latest loss at the hands of the Bush Administration.

Buckley pointed out: "Our Center has bent over backwards to accept a significant amount of logging and to attempt to find middle ground with the Forest Service and the timber industry. This "in your face" decision by the Forest Service just goes to show that the Forest Service is far more interested in pleasing the timber industry or politicians in Washington, DC than it is in truly providing balanced forest management or caring for the land and its resources. Obviously, the politically powerful industry is always going to win as long as there is such an anti-environmental administration in charge in of our national forests. This just adds to the on-going tragedy."