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Redwoods On Lot

Redway Residents Irate Over Logging Action

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REDWAY, Humboldt Co. — When logger Walter Wilkinson bought a three-quarter-acre residential lot here it had 800-year-old redwood trees on it.

That was a month or so ago.

Today, the lot appears bare; the town of Redway is outraged; a state official has been reprimanded; two loggers have pleaded guilty to charg-

es connected with the cutting; the county supervisors have tightened logging regulations; the grand jury has been asked to get into the fray, and the people who sold the lot are heartsick.

The incident began earlier this year when Val and Rhonda O'Kane of Garberville decided to sell the lot that had been in the family 50 years; they wanted to buy a larger parcel elsewhere.

Wilkinson and the O'Kanes agreed on a price of \$18,500; he made a 29 per cent down payment, saying he was going to build a house on the lot, Mrs. O'Kane recalls.

She says they learned Wilkinson was a logger only when friends reported they'd seen logging under way on the lot.

"We drove down there and just couldn't believe it," Mrs. O'Kane says. "We trusted him completely,

foolishly. We never would've sold it if we'd thought it was going to be logged."

They made the discovery on a Saturday; the next Monday, the O'Kanes, still legal owners of the lot, obtained a court order to halt the operation.

Mrs. O'Kane says she served the loggers with the order while her husband served papers on the sawmill and purchasers of the timber, but the loggers threw her paper on the ground and continued with the cut.

"I felt pretty desperate at that point," she says. "We'd exhausted all the legal channels, and I'd thought there was a possibility that the rest of the trees could be saved."

At that point things got hectic, she recalls:

She pulled her car up under one of the trees being prepared for falling, then threw the keys away so that it could not be moved, only to have a highway patrolman tell her she had to roll the car downhill, out of the way.

So she sat down directly under one of the trees to be felled only to have persons apparently allied with the loggers drive first a car, then a pickup truck, toward her at high speed, swerving away only six inches from her in one case.

But her actions stopped the logging for the rest of the day.

By the next day, however, Wilkinson had completed the purchase transaction by paying off the balance, and logging resumed.

Meanwhile, even before the O'Kanes' futile attempt, Humboldt County officials had tried and failed to stop the cutting.

Stan Gold of the planning department stopped the logging for a time the day before the O'Kanes got word of the situation.

But he says he was told by a deputy county counsel that he would have to let the logging proceed if the loggers obtained a statement from a state forester that the trees being removed were "potentially dangerous."

That statement was produced late Friday from Michael Saifen, a forester for the state Department of Forest-

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San Francisco Steve Baker views clear-cut area where redwoods once stood.

See Photos by Bill Israel

ry, and there was nothing else the county could do, says Gold.

Salfen apparently has been reprimanded for his action.

Two of his superiors, Verne Osburn and Bill Harrington, both have said the trees cut probably were no more dangerous than any other 800-year-old redwoods.

And Harrington has added that he would have preferred that Salfen had not made the declaration that the trees were potential dangers. He refuses to say what discipline Salfen faces, except to say he will not be fired.

Salfen has commented with a terse, "You might say I got my ass in a sling."

But any action against Salfen is after the fact, and the citizens of the community are expressing outrage.

Don Hunt, who commutes to an advertising job in Eureka, says, "Everybody in lower Redway — 80 to 90 per cent of the people, I'd say — is ready to put money in the pot to do something about this."

Adds John Winzler, a Eureka civil engineer who spends his summers in Redway, "This is what makes Sierra Clubs."

Redway, 65 miles south of Eureka, is a popular second home community for Eureka residents who want to escape the fog that grips that city in the summertime.

Bob Madsen, a summer home owner who is a Eureka real estate man and a former mayor of the city, charges, "There's a lot of egg on the county's face."

He blames both the county and state for failing to act to halt the cutting when Wilkinson filed a required timber harvest exemption notice.

But state officials counter that they have no jurisdiction on logging in areas smaller than three acres.

And Gold, the county planning official, acknowledges that his department received such a notice, but it was apparently just filed routinely and not even noticed until the uproar began

after the loggers moved in.

In the wake of the incident, the county supervisors have adopted an emergency ordinance requiring a use permit to fell even dangerous and diseased trees, with board chairman Erv Renner denouncing "unscrupulous gyppo loggers."

And according to a spokesman for the county grand jury, at least one Redway resident has asked the jury to look into the situation.

The only legal action to have arisen from the incident came when two men who contracted to clean up following the logging, one of them Wilkinson's brother, William, pleaded guilty to charges they dumped debris down a bluff over the south fork of the Eel River.

Wilkinson, 25, appears surprised that the logging created such a stir, but he points out confidently, "Everything I did was within the law."

He denies rumors that he sold the timber for \$50,000 or more, but he refuses to disclose the amount.

The high potential profit, however, may be part of the reason the logging created such a stir.

One long-time Redway observer, who asks to remain unidentified, points out that the O'Kanes sold a residential lot to Wilkinson, but Wilkinson bought virgin redwood timber.

"This is a moral issue," says the observer. "These guys made a helluva deal. They bought at ground prices and sold at virgin redwood prices."

Lassen Appoints Game Commissioners

SUSANVILLE — Lassen County supervisors have named James A. Gaumer and Fred Robers, both of Susanville, to the Lassen County Fish and Game Commission.