

Lounging Chairs Raise Redwood Enthusiasts Ire

EUREKA, Calif. -- The patio lounge you may be sitting on plays a major role in a heated debate between conservationists and the lumber industry over the proper use of the month's redwoods.

It is easy to get emotional about the redwoods but it is not easy to decide what shall be done. So many people have to be decided, however, that the debate has assumed the decorum of Saturday night in a logging camp.

"Timber!" cry partisans of all sides as they dive into the fray. But to the lumber industry, timber means board feet and patio furniture. To the conservationists--"those deep breathers" to their critics--timber is a tree made by God, uncut by man.

Somewhere between these extremes is the campaign to create a national redwood park, a park that will preserve enough redwoods for ages to come, yet leave enough for the timber industry of today.

Few, really, are opposed to such a park. But opinion as to where it should be, how big it should be and what it should be is a many-splintered thing. For every pro there is a con. By and large, the debate is well-intentioned. But it keeps whipping to and fro like a two-man saw to no decision.

AND MEANWHILE the trees fall.

The coast redwood--sequoia sempervirens, always green--is the world's tallest tree. It is not even the biggest or oldest tree in California. Its cousin, the Sierra sequoia, is here, and the bristlecone pine can live twice as long--4,500 years. But en masse in their forests the coast redwoods have singular beauty. They also have singular resistance to termites, decay and fire; low shrinkage and clear grain.

"As lumber, the coast redwoods were too good to live," said John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club, a leading conservationist organization.

Trus. So the trees fall. There were perhaps two million acres of coast redwoods when Russian settlers began harvesting them early in the 19th century. Today little more than a tenth of that remains uncut. Within 10 years, some say, the last privately owned virgin growth will be gone.

Friends of the forest have long been active against such a day. The first park proposal came in 1852, the first actual park in 1902. In 1916 private citizens organized the Save-the-Redwoods League. In the intervening half century, the league, on a matching basis with the state, has spent \$23 million to set aside 117,000 acres in state parks. Most of this was bought from private industry which preserved land for just such use, paying taxes on it all the while. The Pacific Lumber Co., for instance, has held one such 2,100-acre tract for 40 years. In one recent year this cost it \$33,000 in taxes.

In those parks is an estimated one-quarter to one-half of all the superlative river flat groves that ever existed. Much of this land was acquired during the Depression when redwood timber sold for less than a hundredth of what it brings today.

BUT THEN came the post-war housing boom. And the trees fell.

Private industry currently takes about 900 million board feet a year--around 15,000 acres--from its 850,000 acres. Industry reuses, and most of its foresters think it will be able to balance its harvest with new growth at the present cut level--if no more land is "lost" to the parks.

The matter is central to the park debate.

John Miles, a redwood forestry consultant, says "the present privately owned growth threat is adequate--just barely--to sustain the industry until the great acreage of second growth becomes merchantable two or three decades hence."

CONSERVATIONISTS particularly the Sierra Club, dispute this. They say the companies will "cut out and get

one" and therefore their arguments about losing further land are specious. They don't need the land to stay in business because they don't intend to anyway.

In rebuttal, industry notes that Georgia-Pacific Corp. and the Simpson Lumber Co. have spent over \$70 million in new redwood pulp plants--a new use for the wood--in the last few years, have developed processes to use waste redwood scraps that used to be burned and that these new technologies

will enable them to get more wood from the same acreage.

"For my money," says an official of the National Park Service, "the companies aren't spending this kind of dough just to go out of business."

The world, if it had to, could survive without redwood lumber. But without a redwood forest?

"If a full range of redwood is not preserved, we are left with a chapter missing," says Dave Van de Mark, a young college student who is head of a

local group called Citizens for a Redwood Park. "It could take years to find out what that chapter might have meant."

So the Sierra Club, which originally proposed a 90,000-acre park but has trimmed it to 75,000, claims its proposal is the minimum for a national park worthy of the name.

BUT ITS PARK, alas, is neither the same size nor in the same place as that recommended by the National Park Service (NPS).

The club's park would be established along Redwood Creek and would include the existing Prairie Creek State Park as well as the drainages of Lost Man and Little Creeks. It would take all 22,000 acres of the Arcata Redwood Co.--ARCO--and a good slice of Georgia-Pacific which the giant lumber firm says is vital to its redwood operations.

The NPS park, proposed in the so-called "administration" bill, calls for a 43,484-acre park which would include Jedd-

diah Smith and Del Norte Coast Redwoods State Parks--about 15,000 acres, of which 12,000 is virgin-adjacent acreage from private firms including 10,000 of the Rellin Lumber Co. and 1,600 acres along Redwood Creek to the south where the National Geographic Society claimed to have found the tallest redwoods in 1954--now called the Tall Trees area.

INTEREST in a national park accelerated after the discovery of the Tall Trees and a particularly noticeable timbering by ARCO along Route 101. Although a timbered redwood tract is soon busy with fledgling giants, for a while it admittedly "looks like hell," as a candid forester put it. ARCO's cut looked like hell for all to see, and they did and began hollering.

Between the Sierra Club's bill and the administration proposal is a third or "compromise" bill, Senate S2515, passed by the Senate last year and now before the House. This calls

for a park of up to 65,000 acres, including the administration's proposals on Mill Creek and 35,000 acres containing the Tall Trees, Lost and Little Lost Man Creeks in a southern unit.

Also involved is the exchange of the so-called northern purchase unit for land owned by private timber firms within the park boundaries of S2515. The purchase unit, covering 14,491 acres, is owned by the U.S. Forest Service for timber and as a forest study project.

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