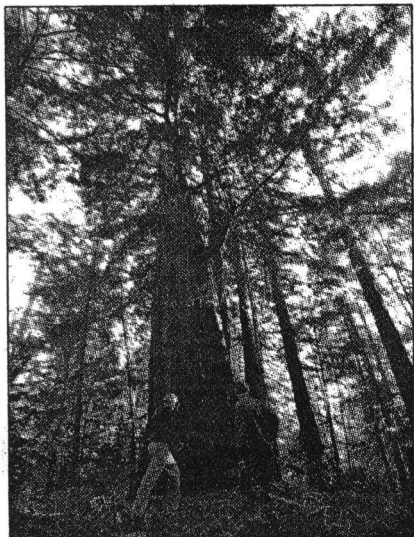


PRESERVATION DEAL



KAREN T. BORCHERS/MERCURY NEWS

Environmentalists Paul Ringgold, left, and Ruskin Hartley walk up to an old-growth redwood, at least 32 feet in diameter, on the property near Davenport.

At heart of Cemex land deal, a paradox

Logging key to preserving
Davenport forests, and
possibly more

By JASON HOPPIN

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✓ DAVENPORT — It seems backward that to save trees you need to cut some of them down, but a hard reality is making it so.

A quintet of conservation groups announced this week a \$30 million deal to preserve more than 8,500 pristine acres of forests above Davenport — the largest privately owned tract of land in the county. But underpinning the deal is a plan to continue selectively harvesting the forest, an idea that may cause controversy in some circles.

But many conservationists say the plan is needed, not just to maintain the thousands of acres being sold by Cemex, a Mexican company that shuttered its Davenport cement plant last year, but also to keep even larger swaths of the

SEE CEMEX ON A2



KAREN T. BORCHERS/MERCURY NEWS

Some of the Cemex property, looking south toward the ocean, near Davenport. In one of the largest land preservation deals in the Bay Area, five environmental groups will pay \$30 million to buy 8,532 acres on the Santa Cruz coast from Cemex, a cement giant based in Mexico. The property, which is 8 miles long, extends from the defunct Cemex cement plant high into the Santa Cruz Mountains.

CEMEX

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Santa Cruz Mountains from succumbing to development.

"That's exactly the outcome that we don't want to see happen," said Terry Corwin, executive director of the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County, one of the groups involved in the deal.

For half a century, the Cemex forests have been harvested by Big Creek Lumber Co, a locally owned operation with a reputation for environmental responsibility. Over three owners and five decades, Big Creek has left in place stands of old-growth redwoods, pristine creeks and dense conifer forests.

When Cemex closed the plant, there was concern that a major piece of Big Creek's timber portfolio would disappear, perhaps jeopardizing the company's viability. And if something should happen to Big Creek, what about all the high-value property the company logs in San Mateo, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties? Do McMansions pop up everywhere?

"The way that the county exists right now, there is a lot of (timber-zoned) land, and people rely on the income to pay for the land," Corwin said. "If you take away that revenue source, it's pretty easy to imagine that there would be pressure to subdivide and sell off part of your land."

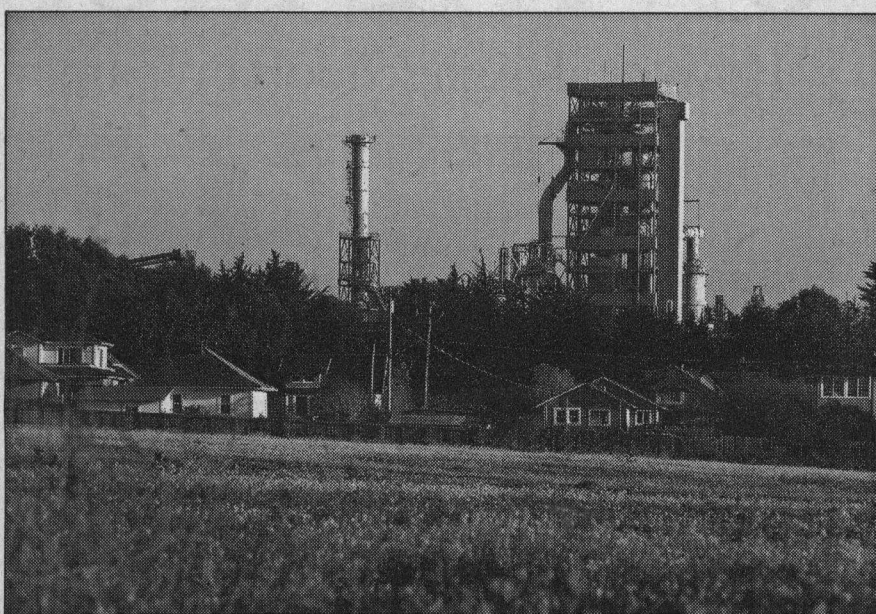
LONGTIME LOGGER

Big Creek was not mentioned in the deal's announcement by the Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Peninsula Open Space Trust, Save the Redwoods League and Sempervirens Fund, but the company has always worked the property. It knows its roads and culverts, and while nothing is certain, the company is expected to continue to log the land once the deal goes through.

While Big Creek owns nearly 9,000 acres itself, it also works land owned by private parties — Cemex may have been the biggest chunk, but by no means was it the only one. Forty-three percent of county land is zoned for commercial timber production, and Big Creek, on average, culls 15 million board feet annually, a figure dwarfed by the amount of new growth every year.

Janet Webb, Big Creek's president, said that any time certain land uses are proscribed, it could create pressure for it to be used in a less-desirable way, suggesting people could draw their own conclusion about what that direction might be.

Webb stopped short of saying the future of the company and its 200-plus employ-



KAREN T. BORCHERS/MERCURY NEWS

The Cemex plant in Davenport closed three years. Five environmental groups are buying the land to stop it from being developed.

ees was at stake when Cemex closed the plant, but she did say the "For Sale" sign Cemex put on the North Coast forests raised alarms.

"Absolutely. Very concerned. It's a very consistent producer of good-quality timber. And it's one of the really large pieces of ground in the Santa Cruz Mountains that's being managed for timber," Webb said. "Historically, a lot of larger tree farms have been purchased for open space, and they haven't managed them for timber."

FUTURE OF PRESERVATION

But absolute preservation isn't much of an option anymore. Money for the state to take on new parks isn't there; in fact, it plans to shutter 70 of them next year due to budget constraints.

Conservationists are turning to a new model: conserving land from development while continuing limited logging. But with logging practices a persistent concern, does the new model cause friction among the environmental community?

So far, it hasn't. Jonathan Wittwer, a prominent local land-use and environmental attorney, said he shares a positive view of Big Creek and has not raised any concerns about the Cemex deal.

"Nobody's contacted our office," Wittwer said.

Twenty years before clear-cutting was banned in the Santa Cruz Mountains, Big Creek decided, on its own, to avoid the practice. It has earned numerous conservation awards, and in 1978 company co-founder Bud McCrary helped establish

the Land Trust.

Harvesting of conserved forests is not new. In fact, the Land Trust logs, through Big Creek, its 400-acre Byrne-Milliron Forest in Corralitos. Small sections of land are periodically harvested, and the public is welcome to visit — as it would be on the Cemex property.

Big Creek would continue to maintain roads, culverts and other infrastructure, saving conservation groups from having to pay for ongoing operations. Bob Berlage, a spokesman for Big Creek, said it's a responsibility the company is willing to take on.

"Our company has considerable long-term knowledge and experience with that property," Berlage said. "We know the road systems. We're nearby if something were to happen on that property."

Big Creek officials and Corwin also pointed out that having a local lumber company is beneficial — local demand for lumber isn't going to subside, they said, and having a local source is preferred to importing it from around the world.

"There are benefits to producing things locally so there aren't these huge transportation issues," Berlage said. "There are some real ethical and environmental consequences to shipping things like lumber from across the globe."

And there is another benefit as well.

Prior to the plant's closure, Cemex was the biggest taxpayer in the county. As long as the land stays in private hands — even if it's in a trust — it stays on the county's tax rolls.