

# Furor over butterfly habitat

## County fells eucalyptus trees at Monarch site

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**LIVE OAK** — Local butterfly experts are angry about the county cutting down nine eucalyptus trees in a grove of hundreds of trees near Moran Lake.

The experts charge that the trees, some of which were 75 feet tall and had trunk diameters 2 feet around, were part of a significant Monarch butterfly overwintering site. The nine trees

But the county Public Works Department legally obtained a tree-cutting permit for the job.

Monarch scientist Elizabeth Bell, who has been studying butterflies at the site for the past 10 years, said an

estimated 40,000 of the orange and black butterflies migrate to the grove yearly. She said it was the second-largest Monarch colony in the county, second only to Natural Bridges State Beach.

County Public Works Director John Fantham said Friday that his department obtained the permit from the Planning Department to cut down the trees because they were threatening to fall. He said one of the trees was diseased, "with the center rotting out," while the other eight were "leaning in a position to fall.

"There was nothing we really could have done differently," Fantham added. "The few trees that we did take down, had to come down."

Dave Reetz, administrative aide to Live Oak Supervisor Jan Beutz, confirmed Friday that the necessary permits were obtained for the tree cutting. However, he said they are checking to see if the "proper controls or checks

and balances were used to protect the butterfly habitat."

The trees were located amid a huge grove of eucalyptus near the county's Lode Street sanitation facility, off 26th Avenue. A county-owned storage building was located near the trees in question.

Both Bell and John Lane, another local butterfly expert, said the cut trees offered wind protection and food (nectar) to the butterflies. Monarchs overwinter in the area, forming dense clusters in what is known as "shingling" for protection. Eucalyptus groves are a favorite area for overwintering, and butterflies come to groves in Natural Bridges State Beach, Moran Lake and along Soquel Creek in Capitola, among others.

Bell called the cutting a "travesty," while Lane described it as an "outrage." Both questioned how the county could give a tree-cutting permit without checking about the possible detrimental

effects to the butterflies.

Bell said the nine trees cut were just across a small dirt access road from the trees where Monarchs cluster.

"It took out wind protection and may also affect the amount of sun," Bell said.

This is critical, she said, because without protection from the elements and predators, the Monarchs will not cluster. Also, if given too much sunlight, the butterflies will get active and use all their stored energy reserves.

"When any butterfly habitat is altered, nobody ever knows what kind of responses the butterflies will have," she said. "Will clustering take place in the same place, and will the same number of butterflies come?"

Bell said it was vital that the county now document the effects the cutting might have on future Monarch migrations to the grove. She also wants to make sure such random cutting stops in Monarch habitats.