

Big Basin redwoods may be cut

By Terri Morgan
Special to the Mercury News

A philanthropic organization is hoping to harvest redwoods from a 320-acre parcel it owns in the Santa Cruz Mountains next to Big Basin Redwoods State Park.

The S.H. Cowell Foundation, headquartered in San Francisco, has applied to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection for a permit to selectively harvest about 2.2 million board feet of redwood from its China Grade parcel, located south of Highway 236.

The site was selectively harvested by the Cowell Foundation in 1979. Logging roads built for that harvest are still in place, and would be utilized to remove the trees, which would be used for lumber and firewood.

One-third of harvestable trees

Loggers would be removing approximately one-third of the harvestable second-growth redwoods from the site, said forester Joe McGuire of Pacific Meridian Resources, the firm that prepared the logging proposal for the Cowell Foundation. State timber plans for selective harvesting allow loggers to cut 40 percent of redwood trees 18 inches or greater in diameter, and 50 percent of trees 12 inches or greater in diameter, on a site.

McGuire said all the first growth redwood trees on the parcel were removed in 1914 when it was clear-cut. The wood removed was used to help rebuild the San Francisco Bay Area after the 1906 earthquake, he said.

"Logging would begin next spring or summer if our plans are approved," said McGuire. The logging operation would take about three years to complete, McGuire said.

200 feet off highway

McGuire said that to minimize the visual impact of the operation, timber harvesting would not occur within 200 feet of Big Basin State Park or Highway 236.

"Chain-saw operations will be restricted to the hours between 7 a.m. and 9 p.m., Monday to Friday, except holidays, to reduce the noise during times when the park is used the most," McGuire said.

Despite the precautions, McGuire is prepared for protests and arguments from neighboring residents. "What would you rather have up there, logging or a subdivision?" he snapped when asked about the location of the parcel.

The proposed logging site is within the 7,000-acre Boulder Creek watershed. Since 1980 logging has occurred on 632 acres within that watershed, and a logging permit was recently issued for another 76 acre parcel.