

South County timber harvest put on hold

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WATSONVILLE — A timber harvest scheduled to begin Monday at Grizzly Flat has been put on hold after the state's Sixth District Court of Appeals granted an injunction Friday halting the harvest.

The city has already delayed the project for a year because of citizen opposition to logging the 200-acre tract in the hills above Corralitos. Now it looks as though it may be forced to wait another year while the court decides the merits of an appeal filed by the Citizens for Responsible Forest Management.

In the injunction issued Friday, the court asked for information about the stay's potential financial impact on the city. The court is considering requiring the environmental group to post a bond to compensate the city for the amount of revenue it is losing as the case grinds through the courts.

The county's Superior Court in November gave the city the go-ahead on the project when it rejected a petition by the group to halt the logging. Last month, the group filed an appeal of that decision in the state court. When they heard about the city's plans to begin logging before the appeal was decided, group members filed for an injunction to put the project on hold until the appeal was decided.

"If they went ahead and logged it before we have our appeal heard, we may well win the appeal, but it would be to save a desert," said attorney Keith Sugar, who is representing the environmental group. "We basically filed this petition so there would be more than a desert left to fight over."

City public works and utilities director David Koch said the city stands to lose the current use of the \$500,000 to be earned from the timber harvest, plus any drop in redwood prices that may occur in the meantime.

"I can't specify how much, but the delay already has had some costs in that the price of redwood dropped somewhat from the time the city originally bid the process," Koch said. "That could happen again. If it's delayed another season, it could be a significant impact."

The court did not state a rationale for issuing the injunction, but asked the petitioners to respond with reasons why they should not be forced to post a bond by April 12. The city is then being asked to detail the financial implications of the stay for the city and to make a case for CRFM posting such a bond by the end of April.

The land has drawn attention because it is a unique upland wetlands habitat in the recharge area of the city's drinking water supply. The group claims the city has not adequately examined the cumulative effects of the project when coupled with other logging operations in the region.

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Sugar maintained the group should not be forced to post a bond.

"We're saying, 'Wait a minute. They're going to completely destroy a habitat that's taken over 100 years to get to its current state, whereas to the City of Watsonville the only harm is that a source of income will be pushed back a few months,'" he said.

Koch calls Sugar's charges "ridiculous," saying the city's proposed timber harvest only takes about half the timber allowed under county regulations.

"It's kind of a mystery to me, when you consider

that the city of Watsonville intends to own this property for a very long time," said Koch. "It's in the city's watershed and the city has a vested interest in making sure that no activities from this harvest will cause any damage."

Meanwhile, a group of Corralitos residents plans to hold a candlelight vigil in Corralitos Sunday night to protest the logging, despite the stay.

"The threat is still there," said Elizabeth Herbert of CRFM. "This has been a real nail-biter for us."

The vigil will begin at 6:30 in the park across from the Corralitos Market.