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# The Leader

( )  
Sunday, March 12, 2023



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# Protestors collide on both sides of Elwha

(<https://beta.creativecirclecdn.com/ptleader/original/20230307-154932-rally.jpg>)

Protestors against the logging operation march down the road toward the Elwha River after the rally to gather for a group photo.

LEADER PHOTO BY DEREK FIRENZE

Posted Thursday, March 9, 2023 12:20 pm

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Tree-huggers and cutters met in a noisy confrontation on the Elwha River over the weekend.

Protesters rallying against logging in the Elwha River Watershed restoration project faced off against the roar of chainsaws on Sunday, March 5.

“This is about legacy forests. This is not about stopping all timber harvesting because we know timber families need the jobs and we support timber families and what they do,” said LaTrisha Suggs, a member of the Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe and Port Angeles city councilmember, during a speech at the rally.

More than a hundred people were present, largely from Port Angeles, the lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, Jamestown S’Klallam Tribe, Lummi Nation, and surrounding areas in the Olympic Peninsula near an active timber harvest site called “Aldwell.”

Signs stretched down the roadside on a section of US Highway 101 over the river with most messages united against the logging operation, though a significant portion of those gathered were in favor of the timber industry.

Occasionally the groups would yell back and forth at one another, and loggers repeatedly revved their chainsaws in an attempt to drown out speakers on a microphone at the rally.



(/uploads/original/20230307-155308-CM1A2017.JPG)

### **ROOTS OF THE RIVER**

The Elwha River begins at the Elwha Snowfinger near Mount Barnes and Mount Queets in the Olympic Range within Olympic National Park in Jefferson County.

The river is also home to the largest completed dam removal project in U.S. history. The federal government has spent more than \$327 million on restoration in the Elwha River Watershed post dam-removal.

Now that salmon habitat along the river is bouncing back, organizers of Sunday's rally against the timber sale argued that industrial logging practices in the area could not only damage those gains, but have a number of other repercussions.

"If these legacy forests are logged, it's not just biodiversity that we're losing, it's not just climate change, it's not just water security and our salmon — it's also local jobs because there's local ecotourism that depends on these forests," said Scott McGee, a professional nature photographer who strives to document places in the natural world under pressure from human population and climate change.

The protestors defined legacy forests as those which have the potential to become old growth forests if left alone.

"A legacy forest is a forest that has never been logged by a machine," said Nina Sarmiento, the Olympic regional coordinator for the Center for Responsible Forestry.

"A legacy forest has been logged before, before industrial logging practices started in the '40s and '50s. So a legacy forest is about a hundred years old. In contrast, manages plantation forests which are harvested around every 50 years. So these legacy forests are double the age and they have the structure that will become an old growth forest."





(uploads/original/20230307-155503-CM1A2031.JPG)

### **A TIME AND PLACE**

The Department of Natural Resources does not recognize the term “legacy forest” and instead defines old growth forest with three criteria: the stand must predate the year 1850 (a marker of European-American settlement of Washington state), the stand must be structurally complex (with shade-tolerant species like Western hemlock and Western red cedar reaching the canopy), and it must be 5 acres or larger.

Vail Case, a retired 50-year veteran of the forestry service, was among those at the protest in favor of logging and said Washington has some of the most restrictive environmental regulations.

“These sales that the DNR puts up, they go through review,” Case said.

“There’s a time and a place to do that, and once a sale’s been sold I don’t know if this is the time to be trying to stop it,” he said.

The state Department of Natural Resources approved the Aldwell timber sale on Sept. 6, 2022.



(uploads/original/20230307-155623-CM1A2026.JPG)

### **REQUEST FOR REVIEW**

The city of Port Angeles initially commented on the sale in May 2022 and requested to be consulted prior to making the decision, and asked for additional time to review the impacts to the watershed and its Climate Action Plan policies.

“As a city we must have ample time to review the long-term impacts to our local water supply and the watershed that contributes to it. The forests are a valuable resource to local tribes, and these lands must be protected. The federal government spent millions on restoration work during dam removal and re-establishing the Elwha River Watershed and therefore we must be diligent with decision making in this area,” wrote Port Angeles Mayor Kate Dexter in a letter to the Department of Natural Resources in September.

The city and protestors have now asked for a pause on all timber harvests in the Elwha River Watershed, with particular concern over the loss of mature, structurally complex forest ecosystems, while solutions are developed.

“Please pause the timber sales in the Elwha,” Sarmiento pleaded while speaking at the rally. “There are solutions that will allow us to have both a thriving economy and a healthy environment.”



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## **LOGGING AND WATER QUALITY**

According to a report by the agency on “Water Quality and Forestry Activities,” sediment is the pollutant most associated with forestry activities in regards to watersheds.

Fine sediments, of the size that can be deposited between grains of sand, are most threatening to fish. If deposited on fish eggs, those sediments can reduce egg-to-fry survival and fry quality by suffocating eggs and forming a physical barrier to emerging larvae.

The report also states that high sediment concentrations in the water can cause pools — preferred by some salmon species such as coho — to fill with sediment and reduce or destroy rearing habitat. One study documented in the report showed that when streams are affected by high sediment deposition, recovery of fish habitat can take decades.

Recent research in Canada has also demonstrated that clear-cut harvesting can lead to increased mercury concentrations in runoff. When those forested areas are clear-cut, the additional runoff generated after the trees are removed can lead to increased mercury concentrations in the runoff. The Canadian study indicated that the effect is accentuated by heavy, clear-cut harvesting in large watersheds, and that the problem might be avoided by selective harvesting.



(/uploads/original/20230307-160326-RALLY.JPG)

### **BIGGER BUFFERS**

Kenny Ocker, communications manager for the Department of Natural Resources, noted the specific management practices for the Aldwell harvest in an email to The Leader.

The wetland in the northwest corner has a “site-class buffer,” which means that it has a no-cut area surrounding it to the height of what the dominant class of trees would reach at 100 years given the quality of the soil there.

In this case, Ocker said, it’s 150 feet.

“The stream on the eastern edge of the unit has a 100-foot buffer where it is a non-fish-bearing year-round stream. When it transitions to a fish-bearing stream, it also has a site-class buffer. Where the harvest unit is north of the Little River, it would have a site-class buffer, but it is further away from the river than the distance of the buffer would be. The site class buffers here are between 150 and 160 feet,” he continued.

Those streams flow into the Elwha and make up the larger watershed.



(/uploads/original/20230307-160459-CM1A2050.JPG)

### **LISTEN TO THE LAND**

As the rally came to a close, Siamel’wit, a member of the Lummi Nation, reminded those gathered of the way forests had been managed for thousands of years by the Indigenous peoples.

“We don’t extract, we only take what we need,” she said. “The trees, the water, the soils, the sky, the river, this is all we have left.”



As she began praying in thanks for those gathered and the land itself, the loggers continued to exert their presence.

“We want to thank you for those ones that don’t understand yet, they will someday understand what they’re destroying,” Siamel’wit said, raising her voice as the chainsaws revved once more. “They want the money. Money is not what we need now, we need more love.”

### Comments

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The Leader

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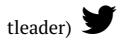
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