Losing Forests Speeds Global Warming
by Mary Lynn Rounds

The news that the United States withdrew from the Paris Climate Change Agreement was devastating. We are pleased that Governor Brown has promised that California would move forward with the guidelines of the Paris agreement. Nonetheless, we continue to lose forested land in California at an alarming rate, and neither he nor our state legislature have addressed all the causes adequately, especially the practice of clearcutting by logging companies.

Undoubtedly, the above question is the one most often asked of advocates for California forests. Clearcutting generally is not practiced on US Forest Service lands, and national and state parks in California – allowing us to believe that the technique is no longer used. However, what most of us don’t know is that many privately-owned California forests are clearcut. For example, just one company, Sierra Pacific Industries, owns 1.7 million acres of CA forests and plans to clearcut more than 1 million acres. There are many other corporately owned forests that are being clearcut as well. On Google Earth one can see large patches of barren land where there once were contiguous forests.

In defense of clearcutting, logging companies offer the explanation that the new small trees they plant in plantations absorb CO2 at a faster rate than the large trees that are logged. This explanation, however, is misleading, because it takes into account the speed of absorption, rather than the amount absorbed. (While a baby may eat his pureed foods quickly, he certainly does not take in as many calories as a mature man!) According to North Carolina State University, a tree can absorb as much as 48 pounds of carbon dioxide per year, and can sequester 1 ton of carbon dioxide by the time it reaches 40 years old.

In addition to clearcutting, California forests face other threats. The combination of the five-year drought in the state and warmer temperatures due to climate change are killing our forests. As trees are stressed, they are subject to insect infestations. The pine beetle caused over 100 million trees to die in 2016.

Our forests face additional threats from our national government as well that will further accelerate climate change. Under President Trump’s administration, Congress is moving to undo US Forest Service and National Forest protections. The “Resilient Federal Forests Act” (HR2936) has recently passed the House Natural Resources Committee and will be voted on in the House soon. This bill would eliminate the Endangered Species Act requirements, would enable the logging of 30,000 acres without a plan instead of the current 70 acres, and would
prevent legal challenges by concerned citizens and communities. Please call your Congress person today and ask them to oppose HR2936.

The Center for Biological Diversity public lands program director Randi Spivak, stated: “This bill is a blank check to special interests that want to increase logging regardless of the damage it does to our public lands, wildlife and watersheds. Eliminating these longstanding protections that actually help forests to be resilient will lead to reckless logging, soil erosion, dirtier water and a proliferation of invasive species.”

Resilient forests are critical to our ability to slow climate change. We need your passion to spread the word and grow our movement. We are counting on you to talk to your friends and family, co-workers and colleagues to let your legislators know that you want them to stop the clearcutting of our forests. Take time to arm yourself with the facts and then help educate others about forests and clearcutting. Our [website](#) and our [Facebook page](#) have some great resources. You can help save our planet.

Thank you!

*Mary Lynn Rounds is a retired Community College instructor who is concerned about the devastating effects of clearcutting in her mountain community.*