

# **California report blames roads, not clear-cuts, for erosion damage**

**Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee, 11-10-11**

Dirt roads, not logging clear-cuts, are likely the largest source of erosion that may threaten salmon restoration in Battle Creek, an important Sacramento River tributary.

That is the conclusion of a new report by a special state task force, presented Wednesday at a meeting of the California Board of Forestry.

The so-called "rapid assessment" report was ordered by the administration of Gov. Jerry Brown after a Bee investigation published June 19. The article highlighted conflicts between the state's simultaneous approval of clear-cut logging and its support for the \$128 million restoration project.

The state has contributed \$56 million toward the restoration. It involves removing or modifying numerous small Pacific Gas and Electric Co. dams to return endangered salmon and steelhead to 42 miles of habitat. The restoration is about halfway complete.

Relatively little work has been done, however, to assess habitat conditions once spawning access is restored. Sierra Pacific Industries owns 82 percent of the private timberland in the watershed, and has logged about 20,000 acres since 1997, according to the report.

The report's authors – state employees who are experts in wildlife, water quality and logging – inspected 16 miles of streams and 55 clear-cuts on Sierra Pacific land. The group saw evidence of erosion entering a stream from just one clear-cut.

Logging roads and county-maintained roads in the watershed, however, presented a larger threat to water quality. Two-thirds of road crossings at streams, and road segments near streams, were producing erosion. This eroding dirt clogs gravels in which fish deposit their eggs, rendering rivers unfit for spawning.

"Sierra Pacific actually welcomes this report, which demonstrates the focus of sediment is on roads," said Cajun James, the company's research and monitoring manager. "We feel we're doing the best job we possibly can to reduce sediment inflow."

The Board of Forestry is drafting new rules to address the erosion problem from roads built by logging companies to remove timber. In its recommendations, the task force supports that rule package, and urges counties to adopt similar measures for public roads in rural areas.

The task force also acknowledged limitations in its work. The inspections occurred in the dry season, when erosion is less visible, and included no water quality testing. It also did not consider long-term effects of clear-cutting, or potential for a major storm to cause catastrophic erosion, like an event in 1997.

"The findings actually corroborate very well the concerns brought forward by citizens," said Jodi Frediani, executive director of Citizens for Responsible Forest Management. "There's got to be an independent water quality monitoring program put in place."