

## California Redwoods Project



Location: California

Client: Private Sector Company

Outcome: Ended lawsuits and restored company operations while protecting sensitive habitat

At the height of a hostile buy-out and mounting lawsuits aimed at company timber harvesting practices in California, our expertise was utilized to provide science-based solutions to emotionally charged issues involving endangered species and forest management. Our understanding of the science, policy, and our focus good relationships made us uniquely positioned to assist in this project. We worked with the company to assemble an independent panel of experts, increase public engagement, and work with state and federal agencies to use science in their decision-making process. Our data-driven efforts focused attention on the resource itself and reduced the emotional elements involved in company-agency agreements. We assisted in instituting a Habitat Conservation Plan as well as a public buy-out of sections of forest to be conserved for future generations.

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### Smart Solutions to Environmental Risks

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## Project Overview

Since 1863 the Murphy Family Redwoods Company in California was known for its slow-cut practice resulting in sustainable harvesting and stable local employment. Their 200,000+ acres of lands held large amounts of redwood assets including six groves of old growth, uncut forests. The company had no debt and enjoyed a positive reputation. In the late 1980s, the company was acquired in a hostile and highly-leveraged buy-out. The new owners immediately increased the harvesting rate, cashing-in on the high value of old-growth redwoods to service debt and to realize gain. Environmental groups were outraged. The forests were home to the endangered Marbled Murrelets (a seabird that nests only in old growth forests), salmon species, and were revered by many. As harvesting increased so did the protests, lasting over a decade. Environmental groups filed and won numerous lawsuits citing the harmful effects of logging practices on endangered species. In 1997, the U.S. Supreme Court affirmed earlier rulings that the company had "repeatedly violated the California Forest Protection codes by illegally logging in endangered species habitat and falsifying data regarding endangered species populations." Citing continuing egregious violations, state forestry regulators twice suspended the company's logging license. The company's reputation with the environmental and regulatory community was in tatters and their ability to operate grinding to a standstill. Protests resulted in the injuries and a tragic death. In the height of the controversy, the company called and requested our help in handling the environmental quagmire.

Our understanding of the science, the regulations, including legal/policy requirements to use best available science, and our focus good relationships made us uniquely positioned to assist. Working with the company, we instituted a critical process which began by assembling an independent panel of renowned scientific experts. We engaged them to review and oversee the science and data involved in endangered species and to identify and use the best available science to guide the company's environmental practices. We facilitated public science panel meetings where the science was openly presented, discussed and reviewed for management so that all parties were fully aware of the scientific results and how decisions were made based on science. We set up a project website making the science itself freely and transparently available along with meeting minutes and transcripts. We actively engaged the state and federal agencies in our process and worked with them to assess the kinds of science that were needed and how that science was used in decisions. Finally, we reached out to conservation and environmental groups to engage them in our process and invite their input to the science panel meetings.

Our efforts helped to rebuild trust in the quality and integrity of the data and science-based management. By doing so, we helped to focus attention on the resource itself and reduce the emotional elements involved in company-agency agreements. We were able to ameliorate the lawsuits on Marbled Murrelets because of the quality and openness of the process. Our efforts allowed timber harvesting to commence while longer term agreements were pursued. In a final agreement, we helped to negotiate a 50-year Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) that allowed limited logging on 211,000 acres and helped provide harvesting certainty to landowners where endangered species are involved. We additionally helped to facilitate a public buy-out of the most sensitive and ancient forests for conservation. The agencies requested our panel be retained for the initial execution of the HCP logging.

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