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To HCN editors:

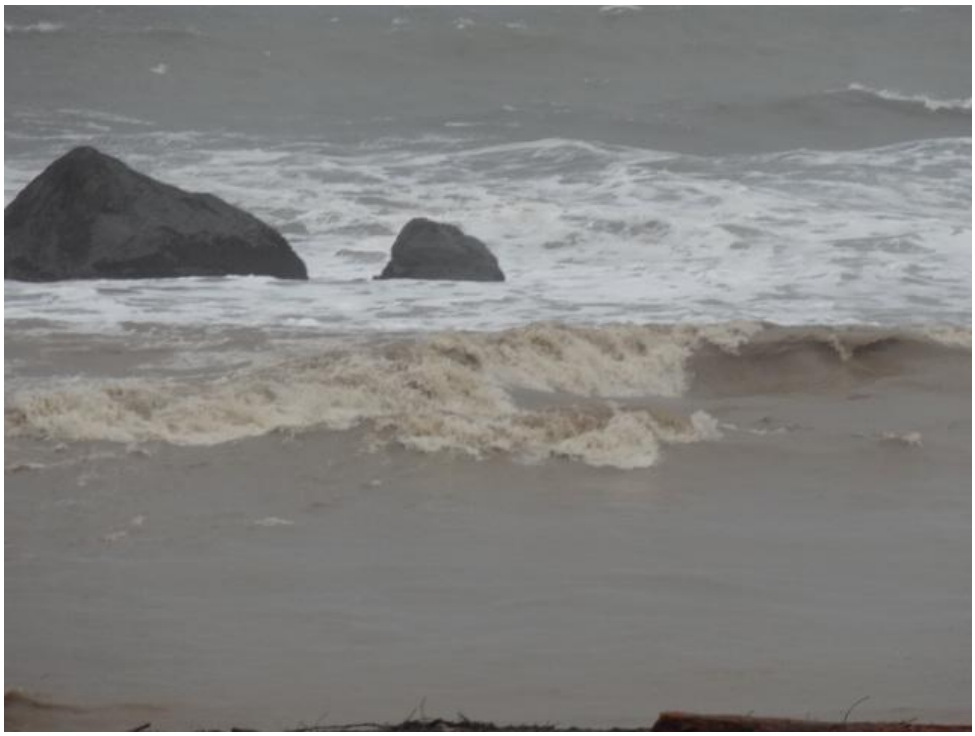
Thank you for the excellent feature "The great runoff runaround" in the July 23rd edition. The article focuses on logging roads - the #1 source of pollution impairing the West's forested watersheds. But the article mentioned only erosion and failed to finger an even larger source of sediment pollution.

Landslides are natural in the young, steep, unstable mountains of the American West; but clearcutting and logging roads increase those natural high landslide rates by one or two orders of magnitude. Yet neither the EPA nor any western state has prohibited logging roads on steep, unstable terrain. As a result, when big storms hit every 10 years or so, thousands of western logging roads fail catastrophically. The sediment delivered to salmon and other streams via landsliding during major western storm events dwarfs the amount delivered chronically from eroding dirt and gravel logging roads.

In 1997 during one big storm 300 roads failed catastrophically on Northern California's Klamath National Forest alone. Multiply that by the number of national forests in the West, add in the private industrial timberlands and small holdings, and one gets an idea of the magnitude of the mountain of sediment impairing western streams.

Fisheries are not the only resource to suffer; local governments spend millions after the big storms fixing county and state roads and bridges taken out by sediment rampaging downhill of industrial timber and national forest lands . In this way, the timber industry and US Forest Service externalize the true cost of logging – imposing those costs on taxpayers.

Here in California the EPA, state and regional water quality boards say they have addressed problem of logging road sediment. The state issued Waste Discharge Requirements to logging companies that dictate what the companies must do to keep road-related sediment out of streams. The "model WDR" officials point to was developed for Green Diamond Resources (formerly Simpson Timber). Yet even with these requirements in place, nuisance level sediment pollution continues to afflict streams on Green Diamond holdings. The sediment is even polluting the ocean as seen in this photo of Wilson Creek Cove in Del Norte County:



All the mud polluting the ocean at this cove comes from Wilson Creek which is 98% controlled by Green Diamond Resources. The Wilson Creek watershed contains a maze of logging roads.

The HCN article provided an estimate of the cost to timber companies if they are forced to comply with Clean Water Act requirements for the roads they own and use; it fails to estimate the costs which these roads impose on taxpayers, fishermen, recreation and other industries. It is high time big timber corporations and even small timberland owners stop externalizing costs associated with the roads they own and use. Congress and the Supreme Court should not get in the way of what is right and just.

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