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Marilyn Woodhouse stands amid a clear-cut forest near the headwaters of Battle Creek, in Shasta County.



Jerry Brown campaigned for governor on a strong set of environmental planks. In one of these he promised "to take reasonable steps to ensure a healthier habitat for California's unique fish species by limiting sediment and other runoff entering streams." Brown now can deliver on that pledge at Battle Creek, one of the Sacramento River's most crucial tributaries for imperiled fish. But to do so, the governor may need to buck a timber billionaire who has contributed to his campaigns and one of his charter schools – A.A. "Red" Emmerson, owner of Sierra Pacific Industries.

As The Bee's Matt Weiser reported Sunday, state and federal agencies are spending more than \$100 million to restore populations of wild spring-run salmon and steelhead in Battle Creek, which tumbles down the western slopes of Lassen Peak to the Sacramento River.

Because the volcanic springs of this area produce vast amounts of cold, clear water, biologists see Battle Creek as one of those rare habitats where salmon could rebound and flourish.

Yet even as state and federal agencies invest in removing dams and restoring spawning habitat, another agency – the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection – has been allowing Sierra Pacific Industries to clear-cut thousands of acres in the Battle Creek watershed. Scientists have found evidence that logging is contributing to erosion that has degraded spawning grounds in the creek. While Cal Fire officials say they've worked to buffer the creek from any logging sediment, they haven't yet analyzed the cumulative impacts of all the various clear cuts.

Brown and the Legislature could turn this situation around. Last year, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger cut \$1.5 million from the logging review program of the California Department of Fish and Game. While the state's budget problems have since worsened, lawmakers could set fees on businesses seeking timber harvest plans to pay for these reviews. The budget Brown vetoed last week included roughly \$10 million yearly in such fees. The governor should insist that the final budget include fees for timber harvest reviews, although perhaps not at the \$10 million figure.

Brown also needs to make key appointments to the state Board of Forestry and Fire Protection. Currently, three of the board's nine seats are vacant, including one for a public member. Brown must ensure this board, traditionally friendly to industry, can balance the demands of timber production with environmental protection, and be willing to use all of its available tools. For instance, the board has the legal authority to impose special logging restrictions in sensitive watersheds, but has yet to use that authority. Battle Creek may be one place to start.

The state's largest private landowner, Sierra Pacific has worked to cultivate a close relationship with previous governors, and Brown is no exception. The company contributed more than \$46,000 to the governor's campaign last year. Emmerson and another Sierra Pacific executive also paid \$10,000 to attend a gala reception last year for Brown's Oakland School for the Arts, which featured an appearance from actor Robert Downey Jr.

While the governor no doubt appreciates these contributions, we'd hate to think they'd have any impact on his dealings with Sierra Pacific. Quite the opposite. Californians elected him at least partly because of the promises he made on the campaign trail. One of these was to "ensure a healthier habitat for California's unique fish species by limiting sediment."

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