LTE Training Handout

Stop Clearcutting CA Letter to the Editor Campaign

The goal of this letter-writing campaign is to convince the public, through the publication of letters to the editor (LTE’s) in newspapers that clearcutting is an extreme timber industry practice that increases wildfire risk, accelerates climate change, deteriorates water supply, decreases biodiversity and contributes to environmental injustice and harms all Californias - it must end for the sake of our forests and for the sake of our planet.

LTE Template

The template provides an outline for writing a letter to the editor, reduces the writing time, and increases the effectiveness of the letter.

To be published the letter must reference a recently published article and be concise, timely, and make one or two main points. If you include your personal experience, the letter may be more interesting to read. The word count must be within the newspaper’s guidelines, usually between 100 and 150 words.

OPPORTUNITY --- The article that presents an opportunity to talk about clearcutting and how it negatively impacts climate change, wildfire, water, or wildlife. The opportunity component names the article that the letter refers to.

HOOK --- Relate something stated in the article to clearcutting or a negative impact of clearcutting.

PROBLEM --- explain how clearcutting:
- reduces our ability to respond to climate change
- encourage fires to burn hotter and faster
- reduces the quality and quantity of our water
- threatens wildlife.

SOLUTION --- state the necessity of stopping clearcutting to reduce the problem.

Note: You may find it useful to include one of the following in one of the components.
- Timing – why it’s relevant now
- Significance to readers - why should they care
- Geographical proximity – how does it affect where you are
- Prominence – anybody famous or important makes your letter more interesting.
- Human interest – about you or someone else.
Sample Letter

Face industrial forestry  (published 3/5/2020 in San Francisco Chronicle)

Regarding “State blueprint OKd to protect ocean, coast” (Feb. 27): The elaborate plan to protect the ocean and coast is indeed good news. But why don’t we have such a unified effort to protect our treasured forests, currently being decimated by aggressive logging companies? They continue to strip 20-acre tracts of mature trees before planting sapling conifers for their tree farms and future profits. Those tiny trees would never survive the drought some predict for next summer.

Because those commercial interests have no concern about killing the big trees that absorb tons of carbon dioxide and emit oxygen, we need an emergency prohibition of timber harvest by clear-cutting. Such action would require a coalition of California’s air and water agencies and the Board of Forestry and Fire Protection, backed by Gov. Gavin Newsom. Can we face up to industrial forestry forces? Ask the governor!

Bob Moncrieff, Monte Sereno

Campaign Message

How it works

Using consistent messaging in social media, letters to the editor and everywhere will give us the best chance of changing the people’s thinking.

The first sentence is the main part of the message – especially the underlined portion. Volunteers may also want to include the relevant secondary message from the bulleted list. For example, “Clearcutting forests creates problems for California. Clearcutting results in a plantation of trees that burn hotter and faster than diverse forests.”
Messaging

Clearcutting destroys our forests and harms all Californians.

- **By Increasing Wildfire Danger**: Clearcutting increases wildfire danger. After a clearcut, the planting of same age/species trees results in a forest that burns hotter and faster than the diverse forests they replace.

- **By Accelerating Climate Change**: Clearcutting releases carbon stored by older trees and replaces them with seedlings that have little ability to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. To reverse climate change, we must both release less greenhouse gases and store more carbon.

- **By Polluting our Water**: Clearcutting causes erosion, risking landslides and contamination of our water supply with sediment and the toxic herbicides used in the clearcutting process. Clearcutting also compacts the ground and decreases the soil’s ability to retain water, ultimately reducing our supply of clean water.

- **By Threatening Wildlife**: Clearcutting reduces biodiversity. Because clearcutting indiscriminately destroys entire areas, plant loss and destruction of animal habitat is unavoidable. Further environmental stress is put on many already endangered species that call the forest home.

- **By Magnifying Environmental Injustice**: Direct impacts of clearcutting on the environment amplify other health conditions disproportionately affecting Native Americans and persons of color. Additionally, pollution-generating biomass incinerators and wood pellet factories, both fueled by clearcutting debris, are generally located near low income and indigenous communities.

  There are better alternatives to clearcutting. Here’s how you can help!

**Sample Template using Campaign Message**

**Opportunity** - “Regarding article” title (date published):

**Hook** – Relationship between a statement/concept in the article and a problem exacerbated by clearcutting such as climate change.

**Problem** - How clearcutting impacts climate change: “Clearcutting releases carbon stored by older trees and replaces them with seedlings that have little ability to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. “

**Solution** - Clearcutting destroys our forests and harms all Californians by accelerating climate change. We must stop clearcutting to save our planet. (use main forest message)
Additional Forest Facts

Climate
● Through photosynthesis, trees naturally absorb carbon dioxide from the air and store the carbon in branches, leaves, trunk, and roots. All we have to do is change our behavior to maximize what nature does naturally.
● We must implement forest management practices that increase carbon storage such as let trees grow to an older age, encourage forest diversity of age and tree species, and use logging methods that minimize disturbance to the forest and soil. In other words, we must ban clearcutting.
● The best place to store carbon is in a living tree. 5/6 of the carbon in a tree is lost during logging, milling, and construction.
● A clearcut site takes 20-40 years to sequester more carbon than it emits.

Fire
● Eliminating the widespread practice of clearcutting trees and replanting dense even-aged plantations would reduce the landscape’s vulnerability to fires that burn hot and fast.
● Young plantation seedlings are planted close together. For the first couple of decades, their thin bark and stems and proximity to the ground make them highly vulnerable to fire.
● Crown fires spread quickly through tree plantations because the trees are all the same height – and can easily burn the entire stand.
● Some studies show that burned or dead in-sect infested trees are not especially vulnerable to fire and are essential to forest health.

Water
● California’s forested watersheds provide over 60% of our state’s water supply.
● Forest clearcutting threatens water quality through contamination from sedimentation and herbicide application.
● Forest clearcutting increases winter run-off leading to lower water availability in summer and contributing to drought.
● Forest water quality is threatened by the herbicides applied during the clearcutting operation and afterwards.

For more information, see the climate fact sheets here or check out https://www.sierraclub.org/california/cnrcc/stop-clearcutting-ca

LTE Process
The more people who submit LTEs, the more likely someone will be published!
● Monitor your local newspaper looking for articles about climate change, water, wildfire or wildlife that provide an opportunity to respond with one or more of our campaign messages.

● Find out the maximum word count and method for submitting an LTE for your local newspaper. Check https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1OKlTaTvmO7dzu1urrqFOrlPKPAcbM7m379I68cNXENyw/edit?usp=sharing for the newspaper or simply google “How to Submit a Letter to the Editor” along with the name of your newspaper.

● Write your letter.

● If you wish, send your letter draft to noclearcut-writers@googlegroups.com for comments.

● When you are satisfied with your LTE, submit it to the newspaper. The paper may or may not notify you if they intend to publish your LTE so considering checking the LTE section of your paper for the next several days.

● If your LTE is published, send a copy of the published letter to the above listserv. Your success is encouraging to the rest of us.

**Your Newspaper’s Requirements**

The process is different with every newspaper.

One example - SF Chronicle

● Locate “Newsroom Contacts” at bottom of main webpage and click on it.

● Under Editorial Submissions”, notice hyperlink “here” and click on it.

● Find the dialogue box and requirements under “We Welcome your Opinions” at https://www.sfchronicle.com/submit-your-opinion

Also, you can often just google “How to submit a letter to the editor” with the name of your paper

**Do’s and Don’ts**

Do:

• Respond to an article or commentary published within the previous two days

• Keep it concise and focused on one important point - “short and sweet”

• Adhere to the word limit of the target publication

• Edit and proofread your letter to remove all non-essential words, typos, etc.

• Only use facts that are verified. Take time to check original sources.

• Give concrete and specific actions

• Point people to a resource for more information

• Use anecdotes, personalize, if possible
Don’t:

• Overstate or exaggerate your point
• Use hyperbole, exclamation points, all caps - the words need to speak for themselves
• Use insults, attack the editor, newspaper or authors
• Use jargon or acronyms
• Use needless words (for example, don’t say “I’m writing to..” or “I think…”

Other Helpful Hints

For Magazines: consider who the typical reader of the publication is and keep them in mind while writing. Many magazines tend to be read by like-minded people rather than a broad cross-section of society

For Websites: treat online comments like you would a brief LTE, add relevant links

Pay attention to LTE’s and comments by others. Note effective and ineffective approaches, style, length, etc. Learn from others.

For More Information

1. Website: Stopclearcuttingca.org
2. https://linktr.ee/noclearcuts
4. Contact Karen@KarenMaki.com

Next Steps

● Contact Karen@KarenMaki.com to join our StopClearCuttingCA writing group - receive updates, info about recent articles and to become part of our group of like-minded activists
● Start writing!!
● Email Jennifer Normoyle at jennifer@jennifernormoyle123@gmail.com with any letter you have submitted and the publication that you submit to. If/when you get been published, notify her again along with the text of your published letter
**Final Words of Wisdom**

Don’t consider your effort a failure if your letter is not used in larger publications where even the best letters face long odds.

Each letter is read and plays some role in molding the thinking and content selection of the editors.

Check out Strunk & White’s booklet “The Elements of Style” to help you write concisely and powerfully!

*Remember, persistence pays off!*

**Practice Exercises**

**Exercise 1**
Locate the LTE components in this published letter and shade them using the colors used in the sample letter.

Published 12/15/2019 in San Francisco Chronicle

Dead tree debacle

The letter “Misguided lawsuit” (Letters, Dec. 11) supports the federal plan for rebuilding California's burned forests. There are ecologically concerned groups opposed for several reasons: The action would be a bonanza for logging corporations to invade forests and clear-cut both dead and live trees, with loss of live trees’ role in absorbing the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide, helping clear our atmosphere.

Their ponderous vehicles would compact the normally porous soil and completely destroy the complex animal/plant communities in their wake. Worse, trucking off dead or dying trees to a “multimillion-dollar” biomass-burning, carbon dioxide-emitting plant for cremation and “electricity” production would be a sad and disrespectful end of life. Let us hope the court decides that some trees can be left to decompose in the forests where they were born, and never become “wood products.”

**Exercise 2**
Define components you might draft prior to writing a letter to the editor.
WALNUT CREEK, Calif.—A line of firefighters wearing yellow protective gear trudged up a ridge carrying water hoses on a recent Thursday, all wearing smoke shrouds on their faces and standing at least 6 feet apart.

The participants were engaged in a new type of wildfire training that involves masks and social distancing, part of an unprecedented effort by authorities in the West to prepare for what could be yet another dangerous fire season and the first in memory to take place during a pandemic.

“We’ve only been dealing with Covid since early March, and there’s no prior history or playbook to go off of,” said Lewis Broschard, the fire chief of Contra Costa County, as the suburban San Francisco agency’s recruits took a breather from their drills in 90-degree heat.

After wildfire damage in 2019 proved modest compared with the record destruction seen in 2018, this year is shaping up to be more dangerous. The National Interagency Fire Center has issued an outlook for “significant wildland fire potential” for the next three months in Northern California and parts of the Northwest and Southwest. The mountain snowpack in California’s Sierra Nevada was just 13% of normal as of May 22, signaling high fire danger caused by a dry winter and warm spring, a pattern scientists generally believe to be influenced by climate change.

The coronavirus pandemic has increased the risk. The U.S. Forest Service has ordered a pause on controlled burns that eliminate some of the most flammable trees and vegetation, citing concerns including smoke that could make some people nearby more susceptible to the respiratory symptoms associated with Covid-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus.

PG&E Corp., whose equipment caused some of 2018’s most deadly wildfires, said it is behind on plans to install high-definition fire cameras because shelter-in-place orders have affected its crews. However, the utility said its efforts to improve grid safety ahead of wildfire season are mostly on track and it has finished nearly half the tree-trimming work it planned to complete this year, which can reduce the risk of blazes starting.

But the biggest question is whether federal, state and county firefighting outfits will be able to recruit and safely deploy enough staff during a pandemic, particularly if multiple big infernos break out at the same time, as has happened in the past. Contra Costa County, for example, said close to 10% of its firefighters were sidelined earlier this spring after being either infected with or exposed to Covid-19.
In an effort to avoid getting caught short-handed, fire agencies are trying to hire more seasonal employees in advance and move bulldozers and other equipment into position ahead of time to attack future blazes quickly.

They are also making plans for how to safely house firefighters who will be on the front lines. Crews who battle blazes often sleep, eat and hold meetings in large encampments that house hundreds or thousands of people—a type of arrangement in which the coronavirus can spread rapidly.

This year, authorities plan to have units stay together at work and while eating and sleeping, without mixing with other crews to reduce the risk of infection. This would mean the end of fire camp staples such as the chow line and sleeping barracks.

“This is the same concept families have used to limit exposure to the Covid-19 virus,” said Kerry Greene, spokeswoman for the National Interagency Fire Center.

In addition, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection is considering doubling the physical size of its camps that often house up to 6,000 people, giving them more room to spread out.

“We have talked about how to achieve requirements for social distancing, but until we have a test, we don’t know exactly how we are going to implement those,” said Len Nielson, a Cal Fire coordinator.

The pandemic is forcing authorities and residents of at-risk areas to rethink their preparations for all sorts of potential disasters, including earthquakes and hurricanes. Federal forecasters expect the U.S. to face a particularly rough storm season.

Some people living in California fire country said they fear social distancing requirements will make it impossible for firefighters to respond as quickly as they have in the past. On the rugged Big Sur coast, Kenny Comello said he has already begun pruning weeds and other vegetation on his 5-acre lot overlooking the Pacific.

“You’re going to have to assume you’re not going to get any help this year,” the 69 year-old retiree said.
**LTE Template**

**OPPORTUNITY:** “Coronavirus Heightens California’s Wildfire Threat” (May 29) unmasks the challenges California firefighters and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection have to face when tackling the looming wildfire season with the additional burden of the pandemic.

**HOOK:** Even as the dangerous wildfire season is approaching and has already begun in some parts of California, clear-cutting is still a regular practice in our state’s natural forests.

**PROBLEM:** Clear-cutting increases wildfire danger and accelerates climate change. After a clear-cut, planting same-age and -species trees results in a forest that burns hotter and faster than the diverse forests being replaced. Furthermore, clear-cutting releases carbon stored by older trees and replaces them with seedlings that have little ability to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

**SOLUTION:** By putting an end to clear-cutting and supporting forest management, the state can moderate the risk of wildfires. California needs to take action and ban clear-cutting on state forests before it’s too late.

**Published LTE:**

Clear-cutting increases wildfire danger and accelerates climate change.

June 12, 2020 5:44 pm ET

“Coronavirus Concerns Loom as Wildfire Season Nears” (U.S. News, May 30) unmasks the challenges California firefighters and the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection have to face when tackling the looming wildfire season with the additional burden of the pandemic. Even as the dangerous wildfire season is approaching and has already begun in some parts of California, clear-cutting is still a regular practice in our state’s natural forests. Clear-cutting increases wildfire danger and accelerates climate change. After a clear-cut, planting same-age and -species trees results in a forest that burns hotter and faster than the diverse forests being replaced. Furthermore, clear-cutting releases carbon stored by older trees and replaces them with seedlings that have little ability to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
By putting an end to clear-cutting and supporting forest management, the state can moderate the risk of wildfires. California needs to take action and ban clear-cutting on state forests before it’s too late.

Denise Thompson

San Francisco