

Wallace tree work coming to an end

By Nick Baptista / The Valley Springs News / Friday, July 7, 2017

The tree grinding operation in Wallace at the former site of an old mill is expected to cease within the next two weeks.

Robert Smith, owner of Smith's Grinding out of Mountain Ranch, established the temporary logging operation in early 2016 to dispose of logs from the Butte Fire burn area.

The logs at that time were coming from PG&E right-of-way as crews re-installed lines.

The smaller logs were turned into chips at the Wallace site and returned to the burn area for erosion control, while the larger logs were sorted out for commercial use and cut to length for shipping.

Lately, the Wallace site has been accepting material from the Butte Fire Tree Removal Project.

That project is coming to an end, according to District 1 Supervisor Gary Tofanelli.

"By the end of this week, 100 percent of the trees from that project will be in Wallace for grinding and that operation should be complete within 10 days," Tofanelli said on Thursday.

When the last tree is ground into chips, work will begin on the property to restore it to its previous condition, Tofanelli said.

It was nearly a year ago Calaveras County entered into a nearly \$10 million contract with Phillips and Jordan Inc. of Knoxville, Tenn., to remove more than 8,000 dead and dying trees in the county.

The first phase of the project was to remove nearly 2,000 hazardous trees from alongside county roads, while the second phase was to remove approximately 6,500 trees from private lands.

However, many dead trees have been left uncut on those private lands because the landowners did not give permission to the county for removal, Tofanelli said. In many instances it was impossible to locate the owners.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency funded 75 percent of the hazardous tree removal project, while the remainder was split evenly between the California Office of Emergency Services and Calaveras County. Calaveras County's share at the time the contract was awarded was \$610,000.

The Thornburg family started the mill back in 1955 and it was sold in 1970 to the Snyder Lumber Co. The property was idle for many years until Smith started his grinding operation at the old mill site.

The operation became a topic during the 2016 District 1 Supervisor race as residents from Wallace Lake Estates had complaints about the noise and dust attributed to grinding.

Tree mortality due to bark-beetle infestation in Calaveras County and throughout much of the state's forests is expected to continue and there is the possibility the grinding operation will be moved to Toyon.