

To Log or Not to Log

Introduction:

As the U.S. population increases, so does the demand for lumber. Each year, every person in the United States uses in wood and paper products the equivalent of one 18-inch diameter, 100-foot tall tree. The need for more timber has led to a debate concerning the remaining old-growth forest. Old-growth refers to native forest land which has never been logged, where trees can be as much as 10-feet wide, 275-feet tall and 1,120 years old. Currently, only two percent of U.S. forest area has never been logged, and these remaining virgin forests are disappearing at an alarming rate. This course of action alarms environmentalists who see the old-growth forests as a biologically rich area, valuable to both our country and planet. Of special concern is the logging practice known as clear cutting, when all trees in a region are cut down at once, which leads to soil erosion, silted rivers and an altered wildlife habitat. The following scenario illustrates how interests conflict when attempting to regulate land use.

The situation concerning this trial occurs in Pineville, an imaginary small mill town in Northern California. Pineville is surrounded by a vast amount of virgin forest land, most of which is owned by Logs-R-Us, a large logging company. Of the 9,000 Pineville inhabitants, 40% have jobs connected to the lumber industry. In addition to the loggers, many town members work in the mill, refining lumber to be shipped to other areas of the state to accommodate the growing housing needs. A final consideration is that the area is known for its excellent hiking and fishing spots. Some of the town merchants depend on out-of-towners stopping for supplies before heading into the wilderness.

Some time ago, Logs-R-Us obtained a cutting permit from the State Department of Forestry and began felling trees in order to keep up with the growing demand for lumber from other parts of the state. However, Green Rage, a national environmental group, has filed a suit requesting an injunction to cease the logging immediately. According to Green Rage, the land should be designated a natural treasure and allowed to exist in its pristine condition. The group cites a state statute which stipulates that, "private land owners shall manage their land responsibly in such a manner as to minimize negative impacts on the greater community and environment."

In an effort to be realistic while still pushing their ideal goal, Green Rage has filed their injunction in such a way that it could be accepted on either of two different levels. Their first claim for relief is to ban all commercial logging. If this claim is denied, their second claim for relief is to ban clear cutting, the most destructive kind of logging. It will be up to the jury to decide which option, if either, seems most reasonable and in accordance with the statute cited. (Note: Such a civil trial would not usually have a jury, but in the interests of involving as many class members as possible, normal legal procedure has been modified for this activity.)

Procedure:

After reading each person's perspective, write a paragraph for each explaining their view of the situation. What are their beliefs and their motivations?

Once you have finished, explain which of these eight points of view is most similar to your thinking. (*who do you agree with, and why*)

Developer

You need to fulfill a contract to build new houses in the Los Angeles area and you were counting on this lumber from Logs-R-U's. You should speak of the growing demands for housing and other wood products in the state.

Chairperson of Outdoor Enthusiasts Club

As one who appreciates the exceptional beauty of this wilderness area, your testimony should illustrate an alternate use of the forest which will inflict far less damage than clear cutting the land.

Native American

Your ancestors have lived in harmony with the land for many years before the white man came and began destroying the forests. Your testimony should illustrate that land ownership should not necessarily involve the right to damage something that belongs to everyone.

Pineville Chamber of Commerce Representative

Since a large percentage of Pineville's citizens depend on the logging industry, you are concerned for the future of the town's economy if the major source of revenue is removed. You should speak of the numbers of jobs lost, and the probable fate of those who are untrained in other professions.

President of Logs-R-U's

You need to convince the jury that your use of the land is acting for the greater good of the community and environment. You might want to talk about services your company provides to the community and efforts the company makes to replant logged forest areas.

Pineville Mill Worker

If Logs-R-U's is prevented from logging, your mill will undoubtedly close and you will be out of a job. You have a family of five to feed and don't want to go on welfare. Also, since Pineville will be economically depressed, you will probably have to move your family to another town, leaving your neighborhood and friends.

Environmentalist for Green Rage

You believe that people need to look beyond short-term gains and protect the environment for the good of future generations. Try to emphasize the "big picture" loss if old-growth forests are destroyed.

Biologist

As an expert in the field of biology, you need to educate the court about the importance of old-growth forests in the biosphere. You should emphasize the loss of biological diversity when an entire ecosystem is destroyed.