

Challengers Take Stances on Future of Logging

How the county should react to the Pacific Lumber Company's bankruptcy has become a central question in the Second District supervisor election.

With the company's 211,000 acres of timberlands in the balance, the outcome of bankruptcy proceedings will have a profound local effect. And the role of the Board of Supervisors has been highlighted by the two challengers in the election.

One of them, Clif Clendenen, has been understated in his commentary on incumbent Supervisor Roger Rodoni. But challenger Estelle Fennell has opened fire, and the bankruptcy has been cited as an example of Rodoni's alleged lack of civic effort.

Fennell had criticized Rodoni for telling a newspaper interviewer that "all we can do is hope for the best" in the bankruptcy case, and on March 10, she put out a press release crediting supervisors John Woolley and Bonnie Neely for initiating a letter from the Board of Supervisors to the court.

"It is unfortunate that the voters of the Second District cannot rely on their own supervisor's proactive leadership here," she said in the release. "When the voters of the Second District decide to replace Roger Rodoni with me next year, they'll get leadership, they'll get dedication, and most importantly, they'll get results."

On March 11, after the supervisors' letter had been unanimously approved by the Board, Fennell questioned Rodoni's editing suggestions. "Unfortunately, once again, Supervisor Rodoni, rather than leading on this important issue, chose to water it down, removing the most reliable set of standards for certification that would assure sustainable forestry in the future," she said in a follow-up press release. "It's time we had a Second District supervisor who will take the lead when it comes to representing the economic interests of workers and their families. I will be that supervisor!"

Clendenen had also issued a press release on March 6, advising that "it is time for our Board of Supervisors to take a stand" on the bankruptcy. "The Second District, more than others, has been severely impacted by the actions of Maxxam/PALCO over the last 20 years and now with a bankruptcy judge holding the future disposition of hundreds of thousands of prime timberland, again the Second District residents will be positively or negatively impacted by a decision from Texas," he said.

His suggestions for content of a letter are very similar to the Board's. Clendenen doesn't recommend taking a position on one bankruptcy plan over another and instead offers general guidelines. He supports keeping the company's timberlands in a single ownership, promoting "the regeneration of timber inventories to ensure long-term sustainable yields," ensuring the longevity of the Scotia sawmill and maintaining the Headwaters Deal's Habitat Conservation Plan.

Clendenen highlights Pacific Lumber's dwindling status as a local employer. "Since the year 2000, over 600 jobs have been lost at PALCO," he said. "We can't afford to lose any more."

Rodoni is viewed as a longtime supporter of the company, but recently, he's acknowledged that Maxxam, its owner, hasn't produced a plan that can draw community support. Mendocino Redwood Company has – and Rodoni has expressed interest in it and has been in contact with its management.

Fennell is the only Democrat in the race and announced that the county's Democratic Central Committee has endorsed her on March 13. In a press release on the

endorsement, Fennell re-emphasized her belief that after three terms, Rodoni has become detached from the district's social realities.

“Roger Rodoni's policies have hurt the workers of the second district,” Fennell said. “Too many families are underrepresented or underemployed. Together, we must make a proactive change and I look forward to ensuring government works again for the citizens of the Second District.”

Government is in for some tough times due to the state's budget deficit and Rodoni is sponsoring a letter to the governor urging the state not to close the High Rock Conservation Camp. The letter is up for approval at today's supervisors meeting. In a March 14 press release, Rodoni emphasized the inmate camp's service and economic value to the community. “High Rock has been an integral part of Southern Humboldt's landscape for many years – a ready resource of manpower for many conservation-related jobs,” he said in the release.