

Fire Up the Chainsaws: Oak Woodlands Restoration Bill Signed

Posted By [Linda Stansberry @lcstansberry](#) on Sun, Oct 2, 2016 at 3:30 PM



Firs swallowing a grove of black oak. Photo by Linda Stansberry.

On Sept. 24, Gov. Jerry Brown signed Assembly Bill 1958, paving the way for landowners with conifer encroachment on oak woodlands to remove the invasive trees without replanting. The bill comes after more than a year of advocacy from small landowners and environmentalists who argued the existing rules by the state Board of Forestry were counter-intuitive to best practices in land management.

While slow-growing oak woodlands have been a dominant part of the Humboldt landscape for centuries, providing acorns and habitat for many species, the absence of fires has given quick-growing firs a chance to gain ground, shading out oaks and overtaking open ground. Previously the Board of Forestry has required an onerous timber harvest plan process to harvest and sell conifers. A.B. 1958 could ease these regulations, creating a seven-year

pilot “exemption” to the THP process for smaller conifers and clarifying language around oak woodland restoration activities.

“We were very excited to see that Gov. Brown signed A.B. 1958 over this past weekend,” said Dan Ehresman, project manager with the North Coast Regional Land Trust. “This law gives land stewards the ability to more easily and affordably restore and protect our region’s beautiful and ecologically important oak woodlands. We’d like to thank Assemblymember Jim Wood and his staff for introducing and guiding this significant legislation through the process. We also want to recognize and thank in particular Yana Valachovic, her team at the U.C. Cooperative Extension, and the many oak advocates out there for their leadership, research and outreach on the importance of oak woodland conservation and the policy steps needed to get there.”

Valachovic, whose office worked in conjunction with University of California Berkeley and Humboldt State University to complete a [research project documenting and quantifying conifer encroachment](#), also expressed excitement about the potential of implementing AB 1958.

“Our data show that Douglas-fir stand dominance can occur in as little as fifty years, and leads to accelerated oak mortality,” she said in a written statement. “Oak woodlands are hotspots of biodiversity, providing essential habitat for a wide range of flora and fauna, and they are also fire- and drought-resilient communities. Landowners are seeking restoration tools to be able to manage conifer encroachment in their oak woodlands in order to promote and protect the great ecological and economic values of these important, but disappearing ecosystems.”

For previous coverage of this issue, [check out "March of the Conifers,"](#) our article from earlier this year.