



SO, WHAT DOES IT FEEL
LIKE TO BE AN AX
MURDERER?*

October 2013 - * Title adapted from a section by the same name in *Natural Process*, ©2001



Our three stands of redwood total but three acres (laid flat) along the sides and bottoms of ridges, some on slopes nearly 100 feet high, some over 200% (60°). All told, it's about sixty thousand board feet of timber. Above is the area that I logged the most heavily.

WILDERGARTEN 5.2

Wildergarten, ©2014 by Mark Edward Vande Pol & Wildergarten Press, All rights reserved. All photos and illustrations except as noted are by Mark Edward Vande Pol.

You are permitted to download this book without charge for your personal education. You may not edit, or otherwise alter its content in any way. Fair use quoting is considered one page of text and must include reference to the source URL. Content may not be copied, reposted, republished, or transmitted without written permission. This is a dynamic work that will be updated over time. I have no intention of defending conditions that no longer exist or explanations that have since been relieved of unintentional ambiguity or error. Please, use a link.

This book was originally produced under the name *The Responsible Party* for which there were two revisions, [1.0](#) & [2.0](#). Major revisions are for complete rewrites. Decimal revisions are for revised chapters or navigational changes and are not archived. Back revs are viewable by the numbered links below.

Revision History [1.0](#) [2.0](#) [3.0](#) [3.1](#) [3.2](#) [3.3](#) [3.4](#) [3.5](#) [4.0](#) [4.1](#) [4.7](#) [5.2](#)

Vande Pol, Mark Edward, 1954 –

Other writings by Mark Edward Vande Pol:

[Natural Process: That Environmental Laws May Serve the Laws of Nature](#), ©Wildergarten Press, 2001, 454pp, ISBN: 0-9711793-0-1, LOC Control #2001092201.

[Shemitta: For the Land is Mine](#): ©Wildergarten Press, 2009. Contains: 217pp text, 980pp overall, 14 picture books, 2 tables, 963 photographs, 9 maps, 2 drawings, 2 charts, 145 footnotes, 358 citations, and 216 other source references, not including external Internet links. ISBN 978-0-9711793-1-8

[Articles at Wildergarten Press](#): collected writings on Constitutional history and regulatory racketeering by tax-exempt “charitable” foundations

Wildergarten Press
P.O. Box 98
Redwood Estates, CA 95044-0098
www.wildergarten.com





October 2013
Nearby, but not our property



The first logging in the area (1860~1910), they didn't cut trees to the ground but it didn't matter in that when they were done they burned the slash so hot that it killed the buds on the stump itself. That way, new trees sprouted from the root crown or seed instead with a better opportunity to develop structural support around their bases. You can infer from the hump how much soil was lost.



October 2013
Not our property



Accordingly, the State banned the practice of slash burning. Redwoods that were not cut low enough, then sprouted shoots out of the side of the stump, bending upward in search of light, growing away from each other while hanging from a rotting foundation.



October 2013
Not our property



The burned stump holding these unstable trees is eight feet across. Fixing these old problems typically consumes 20% of the total revenue from a timber harvest. Worse, the wood from gravitationally stressed logs like these is apt to curl when it is milled.



October 2013 This is a lot steeper than it looks

Off this single stump, I have 10 trees over 100 feet in height within a 12-foot circle perched atop a minor cliff about 15 feet high. The leverage against this steep slope of loose fluff on hard sandstone is such that it will eventually fail. It will be very tricky to log without damaging the uphill trees. The reason I have not fixed this problem yet is that I can't afford it. I could if I could sell enough logs.



This is *after* thinning so that you can see the effect described below.

April 2000

Competition among the shoots makes them bolt for light. When the wind blows, these spindly trees sway big distances at the top. They slap into each other. Sometimes the trunk breaks off entirely. Shearing and collision breaks off branches between trees while a lack of light starves branches toward the middle of the cluster. The branches they retain are either at the very top or directed away from the center of the original tree in the same direction in which they lean. The right thing to do was to thin them.





It takes clearing the junky trees out of the understory to see the others well enough to make choices. There is also more room to drop them without getting them hung up or crunching into anything you want not to injure. These are usually either unbalanced, within five to ten feet of a larger, straighter competing relative, or severely kinked higher up. Some lost their central leader and elected a branch for the job. Some of were infected with rot at the junction of the kink (It really makes you think as you feel the flexure while climbing the top section). Some tops are spilt in two (though less often than Douglas fir), especially when poking out of an oak canopy atop the ridge.

The trick was to remove the less desirable trees in a manner that minimized injury to the keepers. This often involves putting on spikes and a cable-belt, climbing 80 to 100 feet up on one of these weak spindly beasts, and cutting the top off in a way that is safest for the other trees. They say that topping it higher is safer (they say that when they are standing on the ground). You see, there is this little matter of Newton's Third Law: When the top starts to fall, its center of mass shifts to one side. The trunk responds to that lateral load, bending like a big leaf spring (pun intended). Once fully loaded, it whips back, and tosses off the top with the perpetrator waving around like a flag on what's left. The Doppler-shifted warble of miscellaneous expletives echoes through the forest...

Then you clamber down (shaking) and get out the trusty felling saw. Now drop the trunk where you can get it out and not hurt anything. Often that process involves pulling it over center, and bless you if you can keep it from sliding back down the hill (oh, and don't get crushed if it does)! Rather than harm a good tree, at times you drop it in such a way that you know it will shatter. For your trouble and personal risk it is not unusual to get a kinked log, with lots of knots and... a rotten core inside that tree you just climbed. It really gives you a warm feeling about the risk you just took and gets you all jacked up for swinging around on top of the next one!





By that time, 3-5% of the wood was down or about 1/3 of the trees by number. Count the rings. One was 90 years old and seven inches in diameter, bark and all. These were simply cut up on the forest floor laid across the slope to slow the rainwater and build some topsoil. Those that were sound were carried out in 12' pieces, maybe to become fence posts. It was steep.

Those “next ones” are usually bigger. Please look carefully at this image. The lower stump is almost four feet across. I want you to think about wielding a saw that big felling a log that big on a slope this steep. I let a professional cut these two.

The purpose for this work was not to get logs; it was to improve the forest. There was no plan to use the wood. Now that the logs were on the ground, before they were bucked off into lengths, the next job was to come up with a legal set of uses. You can't sell the logs, not even in trade for labor; the State holds that as illegal commercial logging. It used to be that one could get a permit and *then* sell the logs, but the \$60,000 (2010) cost of the permit exceeded the proceeds from legal limit of what I could have logged. Of course, that point is now moot because the way my property is now zoned (2001), it is illegal for me to sell logs off my property.

People get all worried that thinning these trees on steep slopes can cause landslides. It's a theory. It's wrong too. In fact, careful logging of a second growth redwood forest may help to *prevent* landslides. Consider the example at left:

I am guessing 250* years ago, a single redwood on this slope became large enough to break loose and impale itself at the bottom of the ravine below. It was buried by the landslide that came down with, and probably after it. The log sprouted and grew into two full-sized trees, each about 24" dbh.

About 120 years ago, white guys with steel tools came along and whacked them both. Another landslide buried the stumps. Up sprouted 31 trees in a 20 ft diameter circle.

Slide
Headwall

This tree

April 2000 * This was estimated before the 'bear zone' hypothesis
This old slide and the stump cluster of trees in the background will
also be discussed in the chapter on managed succession.



...is this tree



November 2014

Here is that same slope fourteen years later from a little lower down.





When I got there, a third were dead, 16 were over 6" and nine over 20." There were three to five in the process of fusing together that were undercut by a drainage channel through the alluvial substrate. It was a wall of wood with half a foundation.

What did I do with this mess? In 2000, (7 years after the initial logging), I got some help from my friend, Steve, whose family has been working these trees for fifty years. Steve needed a low-key practice job to help figure out if he had a career left after some serious back surgery. After I had whacked out the runts, the two of us set up to fell about a third of the larger trees. We planned to drop them all through a fifteen-foot gap between two trunks 40 and 60 feet away. One of those two would have been snagged and broken by the ones we were felling through the gap, so I climbed it to where it was about five inches across (twice) to set a rope. Then Steve bent it about 25' out of the way. I climbed each of the others in turn and set the chokers. Steve pulled them back over center through the gap on a 300-foot-long, 5/8" high-lead cable over a snatch block in a fir on the ridge that we used as a gin-pole.

Once the trees were down, I got to climb that slope, buck the tangled logs, and set chokers. There was no winching or skidding because Steve could back the loader down the ridge as a counterweight with the cable over the block in the fir. Once the logs were out, then came the hard part: a week spent digging out that old double stump. There were two trees perched on its twin tops: one held with but a few cable-like roots winding through rotting wood and the other was perched on top of the solid half of the old stump held by an arc of roots grown together down one side. I removed four feet of dirt with a hand shovel and a Pulaski (a combo ax and adz) with which to cut the roots, redirecting the water away from the unsupported alluvium into the middle of the cluster (where all the roots are). Then we sucked out the stump with a double purchase guntackle on said 5/8" cable, and popped out a dozen or more root suckers the same way. I set a choker 40' up a tree with a block on the end and we swung the stump out of the cluster.



October 1999, The Wall of Wood (Before)

April 2000 , The Wall of Wood (After)



Now, how did I know about that 250-year history starting with the landslide? How did I know how these trees ended up where they did, and why did I think that the action I was taking had a good chance of preventing a problem? When that stump popped out, **I found that old log** from that original landslide still under the alluvium, dead, but still sound. **I dug out that old stump** and learned that history while I was doing the job. That is how I know what happened 250 years ago.

From what I have seen, the environmentalists have it dead wrong. They demand no logging on steep slopes because the soils would be disturbed, which might cause a little sluffing that they fear will release sediment. That may be true, but the real question is, how much erosion is caused by thinning compared to not thinning? If we don't log those slopes, the trees get large and heavy enough to apply sufficient load to the slope to break loose, just like that tree 250 years ago on my place. Landslides like that are all over these mountains (you'll see one later, with a log underneath just like this one). They choke with weeds and weep silt for years. Nor are they all stable. By contrast, a redwood stump cut to the ground line will sprout, thus making a living retaining wall. In other words, the biggest risk of sedimentation in streams from redwood is if we DON'T log big trees on steep slopes.

On the other hand, because I thinned that cluster that grew from that old stump, with the weaker trees removed, those that remained sprouted new branches into the gaps on the side that needs the weight. They thickened and straightened. The bark will continue to thicken to protect the trees from future fires. They will be more capable of forcing roots around their perimeter. It looks like this...

This is the same cluster from above (this second photo was taken from about 75 feet farther down the ridge to the right). One of the six trees is behind one of the two trees in the foreground that are not part of the sprouted cluster in the story.





April 2000



May 2009



Yes, this is the same cluster looking up (taken with different lenses) showing the recovery. In 2001, I wrote in *Natural Process* that these trees would sprout branches and straighten, but in 2009 I could hardly believe the change! They even realigned themselves to a degree in their race for light. In another decade or two, this cluster should be thinned down to three but at that time I can also allow a few of the sprouts to develop. Then it can probably go for another hundred. Slower growth makes better trees and better lumber.



June 2014



At first I thought this Douglas fir (left) had “shoe string root rot,” a common ailment of fir trees but not terribly virulent. Then, when sap rot (*Cryptoporouss volvatus*- inset) appeared, I called some friends and learned that it was infested with bark beetles. I should just be able to call the mill and have them come get the logs while they are still sound as they drive by from some other job (that doesn't exist because we have virtually killed the local timber industry). Now that the problem is spreading, I can probably get an “emergency exemption” under which to effectively give away the logs; else they would cost me probably \$2,000 per log to remove. You can thank the environmental activists and ask them who gets to log their trees instead for a fatter profit as a result.



June 2015

As of 2015, the regulatory environment is changing somewhat for the better. It is now possible for me to thin forest and sell the logs within 300 feet of our home (it was 150'). As you can see from the map, most of our forest is between 150 and 300 feet. So this is a blessing in that I can now afford to get some equipment in here to deal with this monoculture redwood stand so that it can support a groundcover and some shrubs, thus improving biodiversity. Maybe I can even afford to remove the dying fir before I lose too many more of them! I am hoping that the proceeds will be sufficient to fund the improvements to do the job, but that is by no means certain. Yet the small size of this job STILL means that it is likely to cost more than the proceeds are worth economically.



November 2015 – It's a lot steeper than it looks in the photo



You see, it's one thing to cut trees down without crunching all sorts of others around them or shattering them to bits, but it's quite another to get the logs up a 60° slope to where equipment can pick them up and carry them out, and yet *another* thing to get them to a truck and load them on. This is especially true when said log weighs upwards of five tons. I've never dealt with wood that big before.

Lest one think that I am advocating logging in order to make money, one should realize that I wanted to keep some fir trees on ridge tops for several reasons.

1. Fir trees grown in this area are not worth much money. There are too many big knots and the rings are so wide that the log usually does not attain structural grade. They often cost more to remove than they are worth.
2. Fir trees are stiffer than redwood and offer them some protection from violent winds which can break off redwoods as they extend their tops above an adjacent parallel ridge line.
3. I want the redwood to grow slowly for finer ring structure, better lumber, and greater strength, so the shade from the fir would help do that.
4. I want the fir as "gin poles," a sort of mast from which to mount a block (pulley) with which to cable out the redwood logs from below.
5. Fir is somewhat more drought tolerant than redwood.
6. I do want a diverse forest.

So, firs on top of the ridges or just outside the stands across a road (right) eliminates the need to bring in a yarder, which is a huge piece of equipment, usually with cat tracks that would tear up my roads. This setup requires only an articulated fork loader to pull the cable to yard up and deck the logs and a truck with a swing arm loader to haul them out.

The job can also be done with a bulldozer at considerably lower cost, possibly close to break-even. The downside is that a cat will tear up the ground. Of course, depending upon how that is handled, it can also be beneficial. No decision there yet. With the rains we had in 2017, the cat is looking less likely.





Redwood
Sapling

July 1991



Perhaps you will recall this image taken in 1991 from [the chapter on repeat photos](#). Please note the redwood sapling above. I had flattened it with a tree and my wife and I had stood it back up. It was about 1-1/2" in diameter and maybe six feet tall.



November 2014

That redwood on the ground, now 16" on the butt, was that same 1-1/2" sapling 23 years ago, and was over 60' tall when I cut it. One thing that is different about the way I log here is the extent to which I prepare the forest to create room for dropping logs with minimal damage to the trees I want to keep. Timber companies prefer to drop lumber trees into others to cushion the fall to minimize damage to the dropping log. Unfortunately, when one drops a log that way, it can catch other trees and slam them into each other, then making cleanup a tangled mess then requiring a bulldozer. So I thin the surrounding forest first and deal with the trash before beginning conifer removal and then climb the log trees (if I must) to reduce their tendency to tangle as they fall and take the hit when it comes to yield. The thinning will also make a nice spot for loading the logs onto trucks or milling what I mean to use. Both of the small oaks that gave reference to these repeat photos will go for that reason. So I'll have to photograph it again after the job.

TABLE OF CONTENT

Each line in the TOC is a link that opens that chapter in a new file

Part I - Introduction

1. This is Wildergarten
2. A Site History Like No Other
3. When Environmental Protection = Mass Extinction
4. What Is "Native," Really?
5. Repeat Photography, Before & After
6. Proof: Pure Germination of Native Annuals
7. Project Overview

Part II – Forestry

1. Making WOW! - Restoration of Forest Understory
2. Phased Thinning of Broadleaf Forest
3. Conifer Forestry – Thinking Really Big
4. Drainage – When Hill Goes Downhill
5. Roads – From Curse to Blessing
6. Vegetative Maps & Aerial Photography

Part III - Grasslands

1. Grassland Variety in Meadows & Forests
2. "The Onion": Weed Management by Species
3. Sand Hills: A Model Post-Disturbance Habitat
4. Colonization Behavior of Native Annual Forbs
5. Grassland Restoration and Soils Rehab
6. Comprehensive Weed Management
7. Vegetative Identification & Weeding Technique
8. Pre-Emergence Selection for Native Germination
9. Drought Tolerance in a Pure Native Grassland

Part IV - Miscellaneous

1. The Vegetable Garden as a Research Tool
2. Pollinators and Native Forbs
3. Fungi
4. Specialized Tool Development

Part V – Project Context

1. Periodic Disturbance and Feed-Forward Stability
2. Weeds: A Tragedy of the Commons
3. Control Boundaries: Fragmentation Is Your Friend
4. Central Planning
5. Our "Ownerless" Backyard

Next



Each line in the TOC is a link that opens the corresponding chapter in a new file

These are LARGE files; they do take time to load

Please offer suggestions and comments [HERE](#)

References are [HERE](#)

