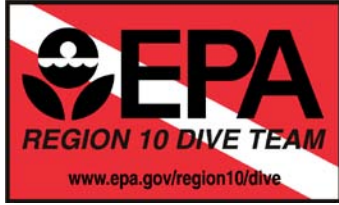


US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT



[EPA Region 10 Dive Team](#)

Criminal Investigation of Illegal Harvesting of a Submerged Old Growth Forest in Lake Washington, November, 1994

What: The EPA Region 10 Dive Team collected evidence and provided documentation to criminal investigators in late 1994 for a case involving the illegal harvesting of trees owned by the State of Washington.

Why: Approximately 1000 years ago, a major seismic event caused landslides that carried trees into Lake Washington adjacent to Mercer Island. Some of the still-standing trees are well preserved. The lake bottom and its resources are property of the State of Washington, Department of Natural Resources. Consequently, criminal investigations were initiated by the State of Washington after a salvage barge was observed removing large trees from the lake.

Where: The salvager, suspected of removing submerged trees and logs from several sites in the lake, was actually observed harvesting submerged trees off the southeast side of Mercer Island by ancient tree researchers who were working in the area. The Region 10 Dive Team survey was centered in this area, but the southwest side of the island was also surveyed with underwater scooters.

When: November, 1994.

How: Several bottom transects, 100 to 230 m in length, were laid on the lake bottom in the area where the ancient tree researchers observed the illegal harvesting operations. Freshly cut tree stumps (root balls) and tops were counted along the transects. The bottom along some of the transects was documented by underwater video and 35 mm photographs. Due to the extended bottom times and water depths, Nitrox II was used by the divers.

Results: Nearly 60 cut stumps and tree parts were documented.

Product: Video and 35 mm camera photos, and a detailed report were provided to the criminal investigators. An EPA diver consulted with Senior Deputy Prosecuting Attorneys for King County, Washington; the county prosecuted the case for the state. After a six-week trial which included testimony from the EPA diver, a jury found the salvager guilty on multiple counts including profiteering, theft and trafficking in stolen property.

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