

'Ax Men' crew salvaged logs illegally

Local News

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SEATTLE (AP) -- Washington state's Department of Natural Resources on Friday seized more than two dozen logs it says were illegally salvaged by a timber crew featured on the History Channel's reality show "Ax Men." DNR officers served a search warrant on S&S Aqua Logging to retrieve timber the company had pulled from the Hoquiam River without a permit, said Larry Raedel, the agency's chief enforcement officer. Officers were tipped off after watching the popular series, which chronicles the lives of Pacific Northwest timber cutters, including a father-son team from Aberdeen-based S&S Aqua Logging. "These are valuable materials that belong to the public and this looks like theft, plain and simple," state Public Lands Commissioner Peter Goldmark said.

An Associated Press call and e-mail to the company and e-mails seeking comment from the History Channel were not immediately returned. Logs provide a key function for rivers in trapping sediment, harboring insects and other food for fish, and creating pools and riffles where fish can rest, said Greg Hueckel, fish and wildlife habitat programs director. "They are part of the functioning ecosystem, so removing the log would be like removing part of the bed," he said. Hueckel said his agency typically grants permits to remove logs in situations where flooding causes log jams. It's unlikely that a permit would be granted for timber harvest, he said. Jimmy Smith, who owns and operates S&S Aqua Logging, said on the show that the logs were worth about \$10,000, according to search warrant records. When "Ax Men" debuted last year, it became the History Channel's most popular series with more than 2 million weekly viewers. This season began airing March 2 and features two timber crews from Washington, two from Oregon and one from Montana. In one video posted on the show's Web site, Smith, a fourth-generation logger, is shown floating down a river in a boat, scanning for logs. "We're normal guys that do extraordinary things," he said.

Reality show participants extracting logs without a permit

OLYMPIA - The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) today launched an investigation into the illegal gathering of timber on state-owned aquatic lands. With the assistance of the Grays Harbor County Sheriff's Office, Gray's Harbor County Prosecutor and the Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife, DNR executed a search warrant on Aberdeen-based logging company S & S Aqua Logging this afternoon. DNR seized approximately 20 logs and 34 other pieces of wood ranging in length from six to ten feet long. "These are valuable materials that belong to the public and this looks like theft, plain and simple," said Commissioner of Public Lands Peter Goldmark. This illegal practice of pulling old growth logs off of the riverbed on state-owned aquatic lands came to light after S & S Aqua Logging was profiled on the History Channel's reality show about loggers entitled, "Ax Men". "Unfortunately theft of the public's resources is an all-too-common occurrence," said DNR's Chief Enforcement Officer Larry Raedel. "But it is unusual for people to document their illegal activity on national television." Submerged timber can be highly valuable for decorative wood. The well-preserved logs are essentially pressure treated and used in high-end applications. If properly permitted, the state's portion of the funds from the removal of these logs

would go towards the management and restoration of state-owned aquatic lands, like Puget Sound. It is important to note that the underwater logs also have a high value in the water, as they provide habitat for fish and other wildlife, and their removal is not a sustainable practice for those ecosystems. "It is unfortunate that the History Channel has chosen to glorify illegal activity and unsafe logging practices on their television program," said Commissioner Goldmark. **DNR manages 2.6 million acres of state aquatic lands**As steward of the 2.6 million acres of state aquatic lands, DNR manages the bedlands under Puget Sound, the coast, many of Washington's beaches, and natural lakes and navigable rivers. DNR manages these lands not only to facilitate navigation, commerce, and public access, but also to ensure protection of aquatic habitat. State-owned aquatic lands include: About 68,100 acres of state-owned tidelands, or 106 square miles 90,000 acres of harbor areas All submerged marine lands below extreme low tide--that's 3,430 square miles of bedlands under navigable waters, as well as freshwater shorelands and bedlands Commissioner Peter Goldmark administers the Washington State Department of Natural Resources. He is Washington's 13th Commissioner of Public Lands since statehood in 1889 and the first commissioner from Eastern Washington. **Serving in the public interest**When Commissioner Goldmark took office, he laid out three principles that will guide decisions made at DNR under his leadership. Those include: sustainably manage our natural resources, conduct our work in the public's interest with the public's knowledge; and ensure that sound and credible science guides all of our actions.