

Mountain Echo

THE NEWSLETTER OF SEMPERVIRENS FUND | FALL 2020



Neighbors in Common Cause

The habitats, waterways, and natural resiliency of the Santa Cruz Mountain region are at risk unless we permanently protect healthy, connected coast redwood forests from development and degradation. Thanks to you, these conservation values are upheld when we protect wild areas and transfer land to a public agency like California State Parks. Another way to protect nature is partnering with the region's landowners to secure conservation easements for their land. This approach protects forests on rural homesites, timberlands, outdoor educational camps, and other properties that cannot or should not become part of a traditional public park.

Conservation easements allow landowners and a land trust, like Sempervirens Fund, to agree to permanently protect a property's natural and

scenic resources on their private forest lands. Those protections are connected to the property forever, no matter who owns the land, which is essential to maintaining a thriving regional forest ecosystem.

Conservation easements have helped protect vital conservation resources, like those found in the San Vicente Redwoods. They also ensure great youth experiences in nature, including easements managed by Sempervirens Fund that keep camps like Camp Butano Creek, Camp Hammer, and Skylark Ranch operating for generations to come.

Since 1900, Sempervirens Fund has permanently protected nearly 54 square miles of redwood forests in the Santa Cruz Mountains, raising more than \$50 million to purchase and protect forest lands. With your support, and by leveraging

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Rebecca Schoenenberger Gives Back to Nature

Growing up in San Jose, Rebecca Schoenenberger has made a career working with native plants. And if you've been to Castle Rock State Park's native garden at the Robert C. Kirkwood Entrance, you've seen her handiwork. Rebecca and her company, California Nativescapes, donated their time to help create the Muwekma Ohlone Ethnobotanical Garden.

"I had reached out to the Amah Mutsun Land Trust and offered my services to help them and they asked me to get involved. It was great to work out in nature with the tribe and with Sempervirens Fund. It gave me a perspective about the plants I never had. It deepened my level of care and respect for native plants."

Childhood camping trips at Big Basin Redwoods State Park and adventures in the Girl Scouts had an impact and meant a lot to her. "I've always loved nature. I grew up on the Guadalupe River, making mud pies in the creek. I went to school to become a park ranger and worked at Sanborn County Park, right across from Castle Rock. Later I worked with a landscaping company that specialized in native plants and thought I could do something on my own."

For Rebecca, giving back is what it's all about. "I enjoyed working with the [land trust's] Native Stewardship Corps. Steward Vanessa Mumululuk Sanchez taught us their cultural practices with the plants and the prayers she speaks to the plants. For them, and for me now, it is important to give back to the plants when you take from them."

Rebecca takes her volunteerism seriously. "I definitely support organizations that reflect what I believe in and support, such as conservation and equality. Since the death of George Floyd, there's been a tide-change of righting a lot of wrongs, and locally we can give back to tribes that have been ignored for centuries. It motivates me to give so that they can gain access to their lands."

Rebecca has recently renewed her support to Sempervirens Fund because we are actively protecting land to save it from development. "Seeing what you did at Castle Rock State Park made it more real for me. Our open spaces are rare and it's important to me that we keep redwoods protected and accessible."

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funding from public sources, Sempervirens Fund can buy land, establish conservation easements, and negotiate trail easements, ensuring redwood forests in the Santa Cruz Mountains will never be developed, degraded, or destroyed.

Thanks to you, as new opportunities arise, we can act quickly and decisively to permanently protect redwood forests. With foresight and through lasting relationships, we can weave together public and private lands to grow our forests. With an array of land protection tools, you help us pursue a healthy and resilient balance of nature, now and always.

Learn more at:

sempervirens.org/protecting-redwoods



**HONOR
YOUR HERO
BE A HERO**

Make a gift to regrow and restore redwood forests after the wildfires in Big Basin and the Santa Cruz Mountains.

Grow the forest today:
sempervirens.org/giveinhonor

Tending to the Castle Rock Native Garden



Volunteers planning their work at the Castle Rock native garden.

My how time flies! We wish we were celebrating the anniversary of the new Robert C. Kirkwood entrance at Castle Rock State Park in person. But we are grateful to all of you for supporting this essential and world-class experience—and the native garden—at a California state park.

With the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe and the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and their Native Stewardship Corps, maintaining the garden is essential for demonstrating the diversity of culturally significant native plants found at Castle Rock State Park. Visiting in person is a great way to learn about the ethnobotanical value of the plants. It also honors the original peoples of the area and supports the return of Native people and indigenous stewardship to the park's lands.

In the coming year, your support will continue the work to:

- Grow the garden: weeding, pruning, adding mulch, and adding additional plants
- Protect the garden: maintaining caging for growing plants to prevent deer from eating them
- Nourish the garden: maintaining the irrigation system and addressing erosion and water flow

And as soon as it is safe, we will organize a public volunteer day and cultural learning exploration of the garden. We look forward to joining you there as soon as possible. **Thank you for your support!**



Caring for Land is Climate Resilience in Action

Thanks to you, climate impacts on redwood forests throughout the Santa Cruz Mountains are being fought every day. As we experienced in August, the consequences can be devastating.

Redwoods are among the most resilient species for adapting to a changing climate, and the habitats they support have the best chance of survival. But they too need your help, now more than ever.

We use the best science, data, and planning to ensure that redwood forests, habitats, and ecosystems can heal, thrive, and adapt. And because of you, this important work to care for our land gets done.

When we work to manage erosion, remove invasive species, reforest previously cut redwood groves, and create fire breaks to try to limit the spread of catastrophic wildfire, we are looking at what these lands need now and in an uncertain future. Because forest stewardship is climate resilience in action.

Learn more about our stewardship work and the vital support you provide for a resilient Santa Cruz Mountains region and thriving and healthy redwoods for generations to come.

Follow us on Facebook to hear from experts or visit: sempervirens.org/climate-action



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Restoring Redwoods and Rebuilding Big Basin

Fire and Redwoods

For millennia, redwoods have dominated the inland coast of California, largely due to fire. Redwoods thrive on fire. They tolerate fire like few species, and fire opens up their seed banks, spreading and germinating seeds for new growth.

Indigenous communities cultivated redwood forest habitats with what we now call “prescribed burns.” These traditional and ceremonial practices had less to do with the redwoods themselves, but rather helped ensure that acorn-bearing oaks and wildlife dependent on the redwoods would thrive.

Over the last 150 years, coast redwoods in the Santa Cruz Mountains have been caught in the push and pull of logging for lumber—which displaced or devastated habitats and brought invasive species—and of preservation, including forest management. Modern forest management is a broad term, and in our region, it often mixes public access and recreation, sustainable timber harvesting, wildlife conservation, forest restoration, and risk mitigation, primarily of fire.

What was once the gift of fire is now a severe and significant threat—not for redwoods, but for people, for our homes, for our livelihoods, and for our lives.

The Lightning Fires

On August 17, 2020, a combustible mix of dry conditions, excessive heat temperatures, and an unseasonal and severe lightning storm struck the Santa Cruz Mountains and sparked a conflagration the likes of which we hadn’t seen in our lifetime. More than 80,000 acres burned, thousands were displaced, hundreds lost their homes, and millions were breathing air choked with smoke and ash. Over the following weeks, our landscapes and forests and parks were transformed.

Within days, the fire had centered on and consumed much of Big Basin Redwoods State Park. Sempervirens Fund was founded in the cool shade of her trees, along Sempervirens Creek. We were founded to create the park—advocating for the State of California to purchase land to create Big Basin, California’s first state park. Since then, with your support, we have expanded Big Basin by more than 17,000 acres and protected 18,000 more acres of coast redwood forests throughout the Santa Cruz Mountains.

You called us into action, and we heeded the call. Read on to learn about our response and what comes next.

Funding Redwood Forest Recovery and Restoration

If you live here in the Santa Cruz Mountains, you know all too well that wildfire is a constant threat to our communities. By the time you read this, we are hopeful that the firefight has ended, our neighbors have returned to their homes—if they haven't been lost—and the long road to recovery has become clearer. We are here for you, today and tomorrow, to support our communities in our time of grief.



SANTA CRUZ REDWOODS RESTORATION FUND

In the earliest days of the fires, your calls and your outpouring of concern for our redwood forests spurred us into action for our beloved Big Basin Redwoods State Park. We launched two funds to immediately begin to fund recovery and restoration efforts. Through our Santa Cruz Redwoods Restoration Fund, we will be working quickly to assess how to ensure redwoods, and the wildlife that rely on them, are restored, to thrive once again. You can donate to this fund at sempervirens.org/redwoods-restoration.



BIG BASIN RECOVERY FUND

We also launched the Big Basin Recovery Fund, and were joined by Save the Redwoods League, to raise money for immediate recovery efforts at Big Basin, working hand in hand with California State Parks, as they access the park and assess the extent of the damage to California's first state park. You can learn more about this fund at sempervirens.org/big-basin-recovery.



RECOVERY AND RESTORATION

It is very early to understand what recovery looks like for our community, much less for redwood forests in the region, or for our iconic and treasured Big Basin. We are getting a lot of questions about what has happened and what's next.

You can learn more about recovery and restoration efforts at sempervirens.org/redwoods-restoration.



VOLUNTEER

If you are nearby, you may be one of the many who has reached out to ask about volunteering. We will be organizing volunteer efforts with many partners in the region, now and in the months, and possibly years, to come.

Stay informed about volunteer opportunities at sempervirens.org/redwoods-volunteer.

Like the redwoods we all cherish, our community is strong and resilient, and we are grateful to the efforts of first responders and the firefighting crews who work tirelessly to contain these devastating fires when they happen. We are here for our community, for our neighbors, and for our redwoods. Together we will recover and come out stronger. **We are grateful for your support.**

