

Mountain Echo

THE NEWSLETTER OF SEMPERVIRENS FUND | WINTER 2021



Helping Redwoods Reset After Wildfire

Through your steadfast support, you are ensuring that our forests are recovering from the wildfires of 2020. We will adapt for an uncertain future, and together we will strengthen our partnerships in the region for restoration of our forest ecosystems.

More than 10,000 of the 86,000 acres of land that burned over in the CZU August Lightning Complex wildfires in 2020 are owned and managed by Sempervirens Fund, including San Vicente Redwoods and Filice Ranch, next to the Cotoni-Coast Dairies National Monument. Properties adjacent to Big Basin Redwoods State Park, including those at Jamison Creek and Last Chance, were severely burned near the epicenter of the fire.

Not only was the fire intense, but the variables that contributed to this conflagration were especially

troubling. Unseasonably high temperatures, significantly absent seasonal fog, and a massive lightning storm created a fire event that erupted with ferocity, intensity, and speed, overwhelming the forests and valiant firefighting crews.

We have walked the nearly two dozen properties we manage, documenting the damage, assessing the immediate work to limit erosion and flooding in these winter months, and evaluating the long-term restoration and management needs for the redwoods to once again thrive.

We are repairing and replacing critical infrastructure, such as culverts and access roads, clearing out invasive species as they follow the fire and emerge through the ash and scorched land, and shoring up sediment and hillsides to limit

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Finding Time in Nature Is Precious

Lily and Tung Vu grew up in San Jose, where they still live, but it took a missed connection at America's third national park to bring them together.

"Yosemite is very special to us," said Lily. "As soon as my best friend asked me to go to Yosemite, I said 'I'm in.' Tung and I were across from each other at campsites, but didn't meet until the next week back in San Jose. Now we try to make a Yosemite trip once a year."

Tung is an automation engineer for Vudu. Lily is a cultural competency program manager for Santa Clara County. We are grateful to count them as donors to Sempervirens Fund since 2014. They and their two children seek out new adventures in the Santa Cruz Mountains whenever possible.

"Our kids love camping, especially when they get to play with our family in nature," said Lily. "It is sweet to hear them express their love of nature and trees. Our oldest loves his binoculars and looking up into the redwoods."

A fifth-grade science camp, complete with nature hikes and stargazing, got Tung hooked on nature: "I camped with friends a lot at Little Basin and Big Basin State Park as soon as I could drive."

They try to camp at least three times each year. "Everything else drops away when I go," said Lily. "Nature is a great place to let go and not worry about the outside world. We've seen bears and wolves and gone horseback riding. It is calming and clears the mind."

"When you drive into the park and see everything tower over you, it makes you feel small but also feel as one with the world," added Tung.

The wildfires that struck the region last August were eye-opening for Tung and Lily. "We were really sad about the reality of the fires in the redwoods," said Lily. "We knew about the fires in other areas, but these were places we'd been to and walked through, and it hit home in a different way."

Lily added, "We chose to support Sempervirens Fund because we love nature, and we've built personal relationships with staff we've come to know and trust. We've donated to Sempervirens Fund to honor people in our lives. We want to support protecting nature and wildlife. We are looking forward to volunteering as a family as our kids grow up."

You can join Lily and Tung in supporting the protection of redwoods: sempervirens.org/donate

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erosion that would impact creeks and streams or cause flooding.

And we continue to pursue the constructive use of fire to heal while mitigating the risks of a catastrophic wildfire. We are convening with our local and state partners regularly to share data and findings as we evaluate what worked and how we might adapt as we prepare for new wildfires. We cannot predict events like the one in August, but we will certainly prepare in earnest to mitigate fire risk and also prescribe burns that limit the fuel load that feeds wildfires like these.

We are grateful for your commitment to protecting and preserving redwoods. To learn more, visit: sempervirens.org/redwoods-recovery



PROTECT REDWOODS MONTHLY

Make a monthly commitment to giving and you'll protect and preserve redwood forests now—and for generations to come. Please join today!

Become a Redwoods Ranger:
sempervirens.org/give-monthly



Bush Poppy
[*Dendromecon rigida*]



Blueblossom Ceanothus
[*Ceanothus thyrsiflorus*]



Beargrass
[*Xerophyllum tenax*]



Acorn Woodpecker
[*Melanerpes formicivorus*]

Fire, and What Follows

The damage from last year's wildfires will leave indelible marks on our forests for years to come, as nature resets and adapts.

It is your protection of redwood forests over generations that has preserved ecosystems that will thrive even in these extreme circumstances. One phenomenon that ecologists and nature lovers all look for after fire are "fire followers."

In the days, months, and years following wildfire, plant species of all kinds, including many dormant for years and decades, respond to the cues of singed soil and increased sunlight, awaken, and emerge from the scorched earth, especially once the rains come through.

In the late winter and early spring, through the summer months, bursts of wildflowers, trees, and brush will surge on the edge of recovering redwoods and through meadows and grasslands. These "fire followers" have an important role in helping ecosystems recover from wildfire and thrive with new life.

One very likely fire follower will be the coast blueblossom. The bush poppy will likely bloom among the chaparral. Woodpeckers will prosper in the recovering trees. And we hope to see beargrass and native clovers as well. To learn more and stay informed about fire followers emerging in the Santa Cruz Mountains, stay in touch with us at: sempervirens.org/fire-followers



Looking to Big Basin's Future

Your outpouring of support and your generosity has made it possible for Big Basin Redwoods State Park to be on a faster and more effective path to recovery and reopening in the future. We are heartened to consider a new future for Big Basin. California State Parks has begun planning for the park's future, including how to reopen the park, and how to plan for a park that is resilient and welcoming.

Just as Big Basin pioneered the California model for our state parks more than a century ago, we believe this is an opportunity to reimagine and create a new model for the future. The destruction of last year's wildfire was tremendous, but we believe Big Basin can be:

Built to last. New infrastructure can be light on the land, resilient, and safe.

Planned for fire. Fire management should be a feature of park management, based on the best available science and traditional Indigenous knowledge.

Co-existing with nature AND people. New park planning must reflect how deeply the park is interconnected with the surrounding landscape and nearby communities.

Safe and welcoming for everyone. Big Basin is a great place to model new recreational experiences that are inclusive and welcoming to all people.

Learn more about our vision, and stay informed about plans for Big Basin:

sempervirens.org/big-basin-future



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Paper: Printed on Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified paper containing 10% post-consumer waste.

Photos: Cover: Beatrix Jiménez. Page 2: Mike Kahn, Ann Blanchard. Page 3: Ian Barnarth, Jim Kingdon, Sterling Sheehy. Page 4: Ian Barnarth.

Design: shirleycreative.com



Nature for All

Welcoming Everyone to Explore Outdoors

If not for passionate people like you, chances are we might not be able to enjoy the cool shade of a peaceful redwood forest and look up in awe at the ancient giants that give so much, to us and to the many species that rely on them.

When you think about why you protect these forests, did it all start with an amazing moment under their canopy? Without getting to see a lush redwood forest in person, it can be difficult to imagine the powerful impact they can have on our environment, our time outdoors, and our spirits.

Since 1900, our mission has been the same: Sempervirens Fund was created to protect redwood forests in the Santa Cruz Mountains for people to enjoy for generations to come. In 1902, we helped establish Big Basin, California's first state park. Our intent then and now is to ensure everyone can connect with nature under the redwoods.

Thanks to you, we continue to protect land to expand state parks and preserve critical habitats, so all people can experience the wonders and inspiration of healthy, vibrant redwood forests.

Unfortunately, not everyone can stand in the shadow of a towering redwood tree. Our state parks and forests may feel like a backyard for some, but for many, safe and welcome access to redwoods is hard to come by. And for the region's Indigenous Peoples, access means more than walking among the trees. It's about reconnecting with sacred lands, knowledge, and culture.

We believe our state parks, and all public land, should be safe, welcoming, inclusive to access, and rewarding to explore for everyone. We continue to work toward this vision. Read on for some of the projects your support has helped make possible for realizing that vision.

CONNECTING NEW GENERATIONS WITH NATURE



Educational Field Trips and Adventures

Most years, local students experience redwood forests, many for the first time, at Big Basin Redwoods State Park,

guided by Web of Life Field School naturalists because of your support. Local youth also connect with the redwood forests through our partnership with California State Parks Backpacking Adventures.

Girl Scout Camps

Thousands of girls continue to enjoy the redwoods each summer at Camp Butano Creek and Skylark Ranch, both of which you permanently protected with conservation easements.

Scholarships

College-bound seniors of Andrew P. High School have received the Tony Look Scholarship to help continue their dedication to the community and to the environment.

RECONNECTING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES WITH ANCESTRAL LANDS

Cotoni-Coast Dairies National Monument

Nearly 6,000 acres—including Native American archaeological sites and rare plant and wildlife habitat just north of Santa Cruz—became the first national monument named in honor of the Indigenous Peoples thanks to your support.

Amah Mutsun Land Trust

Members of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band are able to protect their ancestral land's natural and cultural resources through the Amah Mutsun Land Trust. Along with Sempervirens Fund, the land trust protected and stewards 96 acres of wildlands near Costanoa Lodge integral to the preservation of their tribal culture.

San Vicente Redwoods

In 2016 the Amah Mutsun led a fire ceremony and controlled burn with CalFire to restore forest health and reduce the risk of wildfire in critical forest habitat at San Vicente Redwoods, which you protected nearly a decade ago.

Restoring Native Plants

The Muwekma Ohlone and Amah Mutsun Tribal Bands are restoring a meadow of high ecological and ethnobotanical significance, and tending a Native Plants Garden at the Robert C. Kirkwood Entrance, which you established at Castle Rock State Park.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO THE MAJESTY OF THE SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS

Castle Rock State Park

The park's new Robert C. Kirkwood Entrance connects more than 75,000 people each year to the park with state-of-the-art amenities, including accessible pathways and an amphitheater. Castle Rock is one of three state parks we helped establish in the region thanks to you.

Visit Your Parks from Anywhere

Come explore redwoods. Check out great hikes and travel trails virtually through our partnership with Google Maps. Visit: sempervirens.org/get-outdoors

As we protect the redwood forests of the Santa Cruz Mountains and help reimagine Big Basin Redwoods State Park, we will improve access to nature for all, work to reflect our community in the board and staff representing our organization, and expand our partnerships to create rewarding experiences in nature for all. Together, the best is yet to come. Learn more about these projects and how you can get involved:

sempervirens.org/nature-for-all

Photos: Mike Kahn

