

Contact:

Matthew Shaffer, Sempervirens Fund, 415.609.2750, mshaffer@sempervirens.org

Redwood Forests at Big Basin Entrance Slated for Conservation

Conserving the once-clear cut 153-acre gateway property along California-236 would permanently preserve redwood forests and expand the scenic approach into Big Basin Redwoods State Park

Sempervirens Fund launches campaign to raise \$2.86 million by January 31

Los Altos, Calif. (January 11, 2022) — [Sempervirens Fund](#) announced today that they have an agreement to purchase 153-acres of redwood forests in Boulder Creek, Calif., which will become a new scenic entrance to Big Basin Redwoods State Park along California Highway 236. Sempervirens Fund has launched a campaign to raise \$2.86 million by January 31 to permanently protect the property.

“The clock is ticking. We have three weeks to raise the funding necessary to complete the purchase and permanently preserve the Gateway to Big Basin,” said **Sara Barth**, Sempervirens Fund’s executive director. “For decades this property has been prized for its conservation potential both for its outstanding redwood forests and its proximity to Big Basin Redwoods State Park. We are excited about this urgent and once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.”



Aerial view of the Gateway to Big Basin, a 153-acre redwood-forested property along California Highway 236, looking into Big Basin Redwoods State Park. Photo by Jordan Plotsky.

The \$2.86 million [Campaign to Preserve the Gateway to Big Basin](#) would fund the purchase price of \$2,415,000 and includes \$346,500 for stewardship programs to improve the health and resilience of the forest habitats on the property. Thanks to generous donors, \$100,000 would be matched if raised by January 31.

“Thanks to generous donors we have raised \$2.18 million, so we are on our way, but we really need the public’s support to make the difference,” said Barth. “If you love redwoods, Big Basin, or both, this is a big moment for their future. Donations by January 31, up to \$100,000, will be matched.”

Visit sempervirens.org/gateway to learn more or donate.

A redwoods conservation priority

According to records, at the turn of the twentieth century, the property was almost entirely clear cut of redwood trees. A century later, the entire 153-acre Gateway property is forested from three ridges down into creeks, waterfalls, and canyons, forming a miniature basin of its own next to Big Basin. Along with waterways stemming from China Grade in Big Basin, the Gateway is among the headwaters for the Boulder Creek watershed and the San Lorenzo River. Among wildlife observed on the property are mountain lions and gray foxes.

“The Gateway is a conservation gem,” added **Laura McLendon**, Sempervirens Fund’s director of conservation. “Preserving the Gateway is critical for protecting the Boulder Creek watershed and the San Lorenzo River. And it has abundant and healthy stands of redwoods, and multiple groves of Douglas firs, coast live oaks, tan oaks, and madrones throughout the property.”

Impacts from the CZU Fire

The Douglas firs are especially important, because so many were lost in the CZU Lightning Complex wildfires in August and September 2020, which scorched more than 86,000 acres, including 97% of Big Basin Redwoods State Park. The Gateway to Big Basin was also completely burned over in fire, although at a much lower intensity than the nearby park. Most Douglas firs survived, making them invaluable as a seed bank for regrowth in nearby forests.

“The fire that came through the Gateway to Big Basin was largely beneficial, clearing out understory and regenerating native plants,” added McLendon. “The survival of the Douglas firs on the Gateway property will be a gift to regional forests that lost so many firs in the CZU fire, including most of the firs in Big Basin.”

Stewardship challenges

Despite its abundance of natural and scenic features, the Gateway property is best known as the former site of a considerable collection of debris and junk, as well as a protracted lawsuit with the County of Santa Cruz.

A previous owner, Roy Kaylor, collected cars and other objects that lined roads throughout the property. Kaylor, featured on a 2011 episode of the A&E show *Hoarders*, also battled the county over cleanup of debris and chemicals leaching on the property.

Verve Coffee Roasters co-founder Colby Barr purchased the property from Kaylor and the County in June 2020. Funding from Barr's purchase largely went into cleaning up the property, removing cars and other junk, and improving soil conditions. Environmental assessments during that purchase and a subsequent study by Sempervirens Fund in November 2021 confirm the Gateway property, including the streams, has a clean bill of health.

Working with Mr. Barr, Sempervirens Fund will ensure the property is free and clear of remnant debris. Resetting the property to a natural state will set the stage for Sempervirens Fund to implement forest, watershed, and habitat restoration programs at the Gateway, and improve forest resilience in the aftermath of the CZU fire.

"Mr. Barr has put a lot of love and care into the Gateway property, and we are grateful for his stewardship and his commitment to restoring the natural conditions of this magnificent forest," said Barth. "We are thrilled he would like to see it permanently preserved, especially if it can be useful to efforts to reimagine and expand Big Basin as it recovers from the CZU fire."

Reimagining Big Basin

In response to the destruction of the CZU fire, California State Parks is engaging in a considerable and first-of-its-kind planning effort to reimagine a state park. With nearly all of Big Basin Redwoods State Park's facilities, infrastructure, and trails lost or badly damaged by the fire, and ongoing hazardous conditions in the park's interior, the effort—[Reimagining Big Basin](#)—is ongoing to engage the public in understanding how to reestablish the park for the next century. Visit the [website](#) to learn about upcoming opportunities to learn more and engage with the project including attending the second webinar in January, completing an online survey, submitting a memory of the park to the interactive map, and looking for other upcoming events.

"We have had serious conversations with California State Parks about the importance of the Gateway property for Big Basin's future," said Barth. "Nothing is guaranteed, but we do envision it would both continue to be a dramatic entranceway into Big Basin, and possibly join the park in the future, to expand hiking, camping, and park services."

About Sempervirens Fund

California's first land trust, Sempervirens Fund protects and permanently preserves redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) forests, wildlife habitat, watersheds, and other important natural and scenic features of the Santa Cruz Mountains and encourages public appreciation and enjoyment of this environment. sempervirens.org

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