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Redwood Forests at Big Basin Entrance Protected Forever

More than a thousand donors rally to conserve the once-clear cut 153-acre gateway property along California-236, permanently preserving redwood forests and the scenic approach into Big Basin Redwoods State Park

Sempervirens Fund campaign raises more than \$423,000 by January 31 deadline

Los Altos, Calif. (February 1, 2022) — With an outpouring of support from around the country in a few short weeks, [Sempervirens Fund](#) announced today that they have successfully purchased 153-acres of redwood forests in Boulder Creek, Calif., which will remain the scenic entrance to Big Basin Redwoods State Park along California Highway 236. On January 11, Sempervirens Fund launched an urgent campaign to raise \$2.86 million to permanently protect the property.

“The Gateway to Big Basin is forever preserved and we have the community to thank. We had less than three weeks to raise the funding purchase and permanently preserve the Gateway to Big Basin and the community stepped up and made this happen,” 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 overjoyed to finally have protected these beautiful redwoods.”



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

The \$2.86 million [Campaign to Preserve the Gateway to Big Basin](#) funded 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. The campaign's

first donor, the Lipman Family Foundation, made a \$500,000 gift in late 2021. Thanks to 1,133 generous donors, more than \$223,489 was raised, and \$200,000 was matched by anonymous donors, during the January campaign. Brian Krawez and the team and clients at Scharf Investments also made more than \$100,000 in donations in the waning weeks of the campaign.

“The land, habitats, waterways, and redwoods at the Gateway have been through so much over more than a century—from clearcutting and a junkyard, to the CZU fire—and it feels like redemption to finally secure the forest’s future,” added **Barth**.

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 Santa Cruz 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 confirmed the Gateway property, including the streams, have a clean bill of health.

"For me, selling this property for conservation is about 100 years from now. I have always envisioned preserving this beautiful second-growth redwood forest for its unique micro-basin layout, including headwaters to Boulder Creek, as well as its direct connection to Big Basin." said **Colby Barr**. "I'm thrilled that it will truly be part of the long story of conservation and of California's oldest state park, as well as carrying on the legacy of Sempervirens Fund. Their founders had incredible foresight in the 1900s to preserve this area of land and these redwoods, creating a place for people in San Francisco then, and the world now, to visit and discover."

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 worked with us to see the Gateway 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 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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