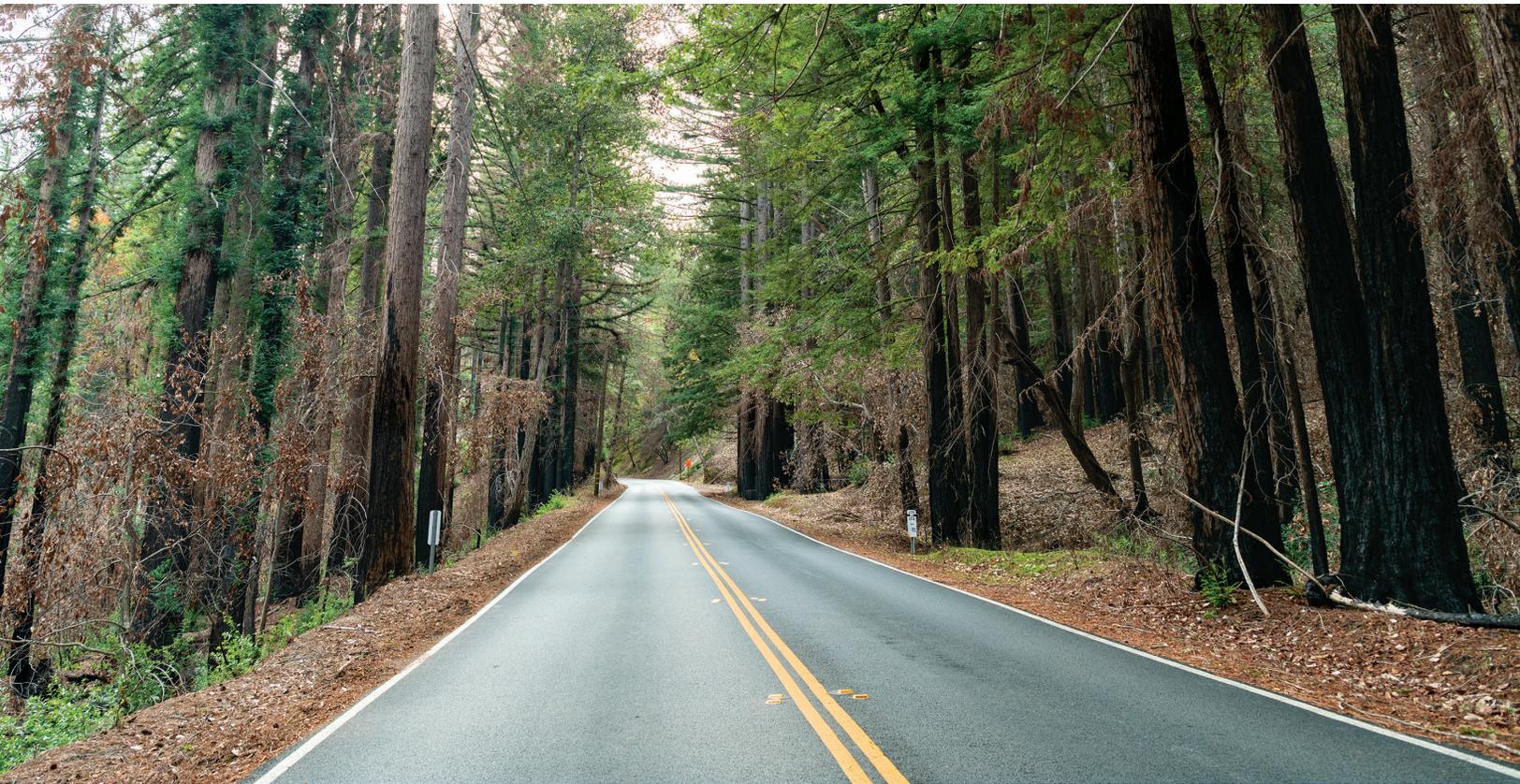


Mountain Echo

THE NEWSLETTER OF SEMPERVIRENS FUND | WINTER 2022



You Did It! The Gateway to Big Basin is Preserved!

Your support has ensured Sempervirens Fund could urgently protect redwoods in the Santa Cruz mountains. Preserving the scenic gateway to Big Basin Redwoods State Park is critical to the health and resiliency of regional forests.

On January 11, 2021, we announced a rare opportunity to preserve 153 acres of redwood forests in Boulder Creek along California Highway 236. In 20 days, donors made the difference, closing a \$100,000 gap to purchase the property on January 31. We will now care for the forest and improve forest conditions for long-term habitat health with your ongoing support.

The Gateway property, forested from three ridges down into creeks, waterfalls, and canyons, forms 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.

“It is a conservation gem,” noted Laura McLendon, Sempervirens Fund’s director of conservation. “The Gateway is critical for the Boulder Creek watershed, and it has abundant and healthy stands of redwoods and Douglas firs.”

Many Douglas firs were lost in the CZU Lightning Complex wildfires in 2020. Most Douglas firs survived on the Gateway property, making them invaluable as a seed bank for regrowth in nearby forests, including at Big Basin.

Continued on p. 3



Restoring Watersheds to Protect Forests

Towering coastal redwoods are main characters in most of our stories—it's the Santa Cruz mountains. But this story about a watershed centers on the granular: boulders, cobbles, pebbles, and sand.

San Vicente Redwoods was protected primarily to restore redwood forests. Watershed restoration has been a key focus at the property's southern edge, where San Vicente Creek emerges from the trees and makes its way out to Davenport Landing to meet the Pacific Ocean.

High in the San Vicente watershed, the soil rests on a narrow band of karst, a highly porous limestone eroded and dissolved into a patch of fissures and sinkholes. These features trap and hold water, cooling it underground before releasing it in the springs that ultimately become San Vicente Creek, and further upstream, Mill Creek. The ample shade, blocking solar radiation, also keeps the canyon cool.

San Vicente Creek no longer has an estuary as it meets the Pacific. For the last 200 yards of its run to the sea, it flows through tunnels, a bore through bedrock under the railroad and a box culvert under Highway 1. Because it doesn't meander, it is less likely to lose energy and be stopped by a sand bar—a rare gift for fish seeking access year round.

San Vicente Creek was changed when the dam was built on Mill Creek a century ago. The dam trapped the boulders, cobblestones, woody debris, and other material that had previously been carried downstream. Without the boulders and other large objects to divert flow, there was nothing to slow the creek's water upstream.

With the dam now removed, boulders and cobblestone sequestered for a century behind the dam are, with heavy rains, descending Mill Creek and flowing into San Vicente Creek. They wedge against banks, against roots, against each other. Again stuck in place—this time the right place—they will resist flow. Natural dams will form, making San Vicente Creek the best shot of being a viable home for steelhead and coho salmon at the southernmost end of their range.

With your support, Sempervirens Fund not only protects redwoods but ensures they are healthier and more likely to support critical habitats.

Read all of Kevin Sweeney's account of Restoring a Stronghold:

sempervirens.org/restoring-a-stronghold

continued

“We have had serious conversations with California State Parks about the importance of the Gateway property for Big Basin’s future,” said Sara Barth, Sempervirens Fund’s executive director. “Nothing is guaranteed, but we do envision it could expand the hiking and camping opportunities for the park.”

And without you, this essential property would not be protected, now and for all time.

Learn more: sempervirens.org/gateway



Reflecting on the Gateway to Big Basin



When you support Sempervirens Fund, you join with a committed and passionate community to protect and care for forests in the Santa Cruz mountains. Earlier this year, this community came together to protect the Gateway to Big Basin. Here’s what donors and partners had to say about this once-in-a-generation effort:

“I like how Sempervirens Fund partners with others. If Big Basin Redwoods State Park comes back, they won’t be able to rebuild the facilities near the old-growth trees anymore, and the Gateway might also be important for the park’s future. Sempervirens Fund is practical and that’s how you get things done.”

–**Steve Belmont, Sempervirens Fund donor**

“We are fortunate to live where we can save redwoods and save open space. We’ve driven through the Gateway a million times, and it’s always like: Whoa! The redwoods! It is important

for people to enjoy the outdoors—this is a beautiful area we live in. This is also home for us, for the trees and everything that lives here. We love finding banana slugs, mushrooms, and moss when we hike. It’s sad so much has been damaged. It means a lot to do our part to protect it.”

–**Eileen and Gary Ruppel,
Sempervirens Fund donors**

“We believe permanently preserving forests adjacent to Big Basin is essential to the park’s future. The Gateway to Big Basin [has the] potential to serve as a visitor-serving gateway and main entrance to the park and could offer potential hiking and camping. As we work on Reimagining Big Basin, the property aligns with our and the public’s expectations for the park’s future.”

–**Chris Spohrer, Santa Cruz District
Superintendent, California State Parks**

“This is about 100 years from now. I have always envisioned preserving this beautiful second-growth redwood forest. 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.”

–**Colby Barr, former landowner,
Gateway to Big Basin**

Help Sempervirens Fund protect more redwoods, like the Gateway to Big Basin, now, for all, forever:
sempervirens.org/support

Healthy Places, Healthy People

If it wasn't apparent before, the COVID-19 pandemic drove it home. Access to nature is imperative for our physical, mental, and social health. And your support is essential to ensuring that redwoods in the Santa Cruz mountains are accessible for all to enjoy. Here are a few ways that access to nature is linked to our health:

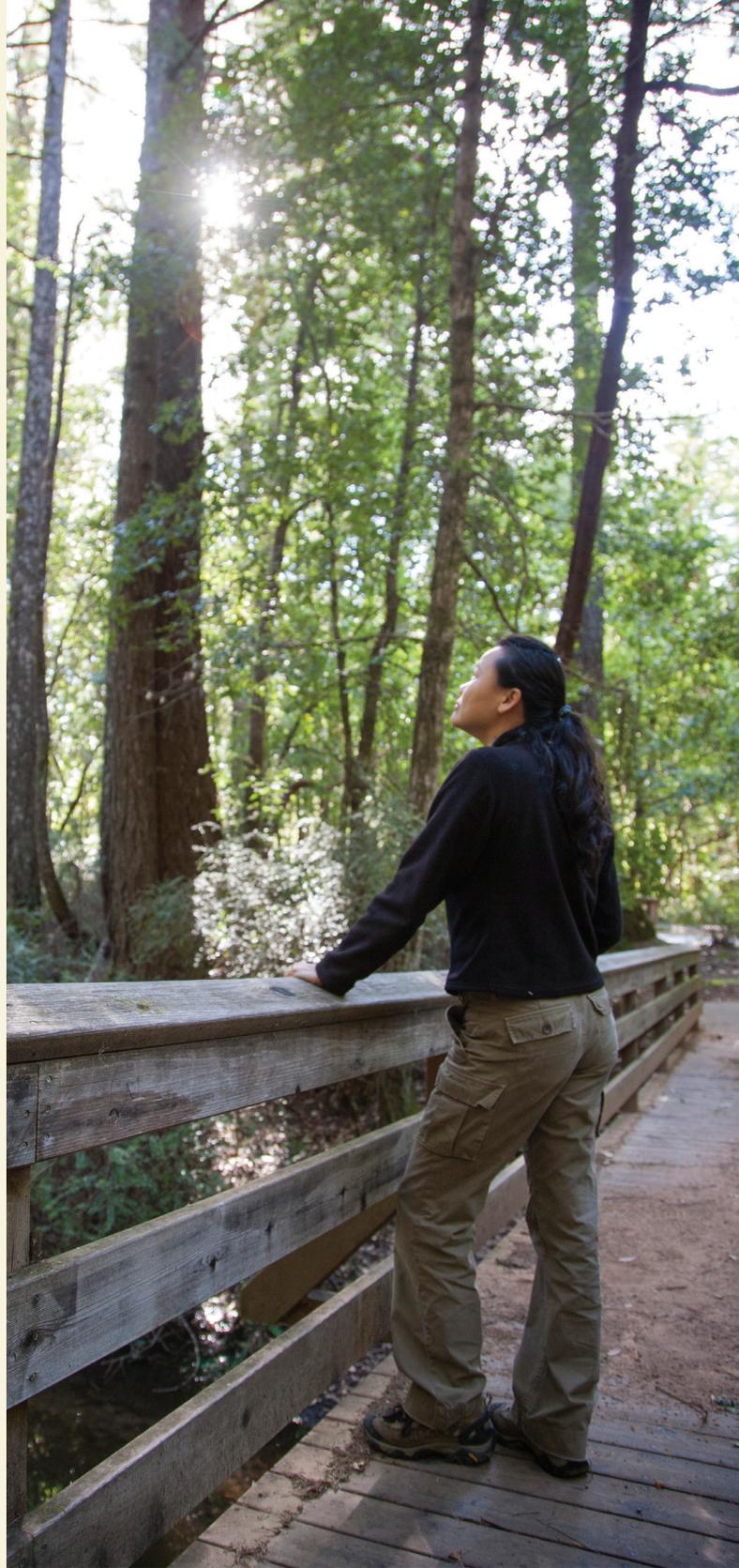
Mind. Spending time outdoors has been linked with reductions in depression, major depressive disorder, and schizophrenia, and increases in self-esteem, focus, memory, and creativity.

Body. Some preliminary studies have found that phytoncides, organic compounds released by trees, help to reduce stress hormones, improve sleep and your immune system, and enhance white blood cells that help fight cancer.

Soul. There are new theories emerging about “awe”—the feeling that comes over you when you see something mind blowing that really makes you stop and take it in. Gazing up at trees for one minute can increase prosocial behaviors, such as compassion.

Earth. Protecting the environment plays a key role in our health. Coast redwood trees clean more carbon from the air and store it longer than any other tree. They also capture water from rain and even fog and trickle it down to streams.

Check out all the facts about nature and your health: sempervirens.org/redwoods-and-people



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