

Mountain Echo

THE NEWSLETTER OF SEMPERVIRENS FUND | FALL 2023



Growing Your Impact

Conserving, caring for, and enjoying redwoods has long been a community endeavor for Sempervirens Fund and our supporters. Together, we are making important strides in protecting critical redwood forests in the Santa Cruz mountains. And a comprehensive, ecosystem-wide approach to land management is ensuring that redwoods have the best chance to not only thrive but also establish the old-growth forests of the future, especially in the face of climate change.

This year we saw nature's pendulum swing back from extreme drought, bringing us historic winter storms. And the land is soaking up the enrichment. Redwoods burned in the 2020 CZU fire continue to reset, brim with life, and recover from the

devastation. Flowering blooms have shown off the region's rich natural diversity.

And people are active on trails, from a reopened Big Basin to new experiences at San Vicente Redwoods. Between happy wildlife and people, the mountains are buzzing even on hot days throughout the summer and early fall.

We have made incredible strides in the last three years, and we could not do this work without your passionate support. Let's look back at the impact you've had in 2023 for redwoods and for our community's commitment to growing the forests of the future.

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From Reimagining Big Basin to the protection of key properties in the area, we are growing the impact of conservation and our community to ensure Big Basin Redwoods State Park continues to recover from the CZU fires and establish a new park experience for future generations to enjoy. This community provided more than \$550,000 in support for a Big Basin Recovery Fund in 2020, which has ensured the state parks district has funding in place to make Big Basin safe, open old and new trails, and invite people back to enjoy and learn from its forests once more.

SPOTLIGHT | SADDLE MOUNTAIN AREA CONSERVATION

In 2023, properties protected next to Big Basin will expand conservation of the park's eastern edge—Saddle Mountain—which is envisioned as the hub for new visitor services to avoid rebuilding in the ecologically sensitive old-growth areas. Sterrenzee Ridgetop and Saddle Mountain Vista boast impressive views, redwood forests, and connections for the Gateway to Big Basin to the park.

WHAT'S NEXT | CONSERVATION, STEWARDSHIP, AND PLANNING

State Parks' next phase of planning efforts began this year. Sempervirens Fund will advise and keep our community connected with opportunities to share your voice and vision for the park's future. Key to these efforts will be adding to conserved lands to help protect the forests within and establish the new visitor-serving services for generations to come. And from Saddle Mountain, to Last Chance, to Empire Grade, we will continue to care for the lands we own, ensuring their healthful recovery from fire.

Learn about all our protected forests: sempervirens.org/protected-forests



Many of the state parks in the Santa Cruz mountains were established and expanded thanks to the conservation efforts of you and people like you, and we were thrilled to record the first sale of land to state parks in more than a decade: six properties added to Castle Rock State Park. We believe this—along with important legislation sponsored by Assemblywoman Gail Pellerin (AB 566) to streamline conservation purchases by the State—signals a new era for the agency at a critical time.

SPOTLIGHT | CASTLE ROCK STATE PARK EXPANSION

Not only did we successfully transfer more than 220 acres of land to California State Parks in 2023 to expand Castle Rock State Park, we also permanently protected one of the last inholdings within

the park's boundaries: Castle Rock Hollow. Its 51 acres of redwoods and San Lorenzo watershed lands connect key forests and will support realignment of the iconic Skyline-to-the-Sea Trail. From the Robert C. Kirkwood Entrance in the north, to the old-growth redwoods in what is now the park's southwestern corner, Castle Rock is ready for you to explore.

WHAT'S NEXT? | POLICY AND PURCHASES

Planning for Big Basin's future and the State's commitment to 30x30 (protecting 30 percent of land and water by 2030) demands investments in the Natural Resource Agency's capacity to purchase land for State Parks. We will ask for your support in pursuing policies that allow state parks to grow, accommodating the needs of forest ecosystems and visitors alike. Meanwhile, we are seeking conservation opportunities that align our climate action plan for redwoods with state parks' needs.

Keep connected to news about policy and protection of forests: sempervirens.org/take-action



After years of research and planning, Sempervirens Fund launched our Climate Action Plan for Redwoods, centering on resiliency and the survival of redwoods. It is a comprehensive view into the lands to protect today for redwoods to endure climate change and thrive, and helps us respond to rising temperatures, erratic precipitation, and wildfire. Through land acquisition, forest stewardship, and policy, the plan is an urgently needed new approach to stewarding the natural communities of the Santa Cruz mountains.

SPOTLIGHT | FUELS REDUCTION AND PROTECTING COMMUNITIES

At San Vicente Redwoods and near Big Basin, including lands along Jamison Creek, our climate plan is reducing forest fuels and helping lands retain water, which protects nearby communities. At San Vicente, with our partners, including CALFIRE, new technology is eliminating biomass on-site: air curtain burners have an outsized impact on fuel reduction strategies. In forests along Jamison Creek, we are removing a road, which will reset critical natural features in the forest understory—good for controlling erosion, supporting creek health, including for steelhead downstream, and reducing flooding in nearby Boulder Creek communities.

NEXT STEPS | RESTORATION AND PRESCRIBED FIRE

We are expanding controlled, prescribed, and cultural burning across the region, at San Vicente Redwoods and beyond. Bringing good fire to the forest helps diminish the threat of wildfire, and it helps reset forest communities, encouraging growth and forest health. Selective thinning also ensures the healthiest trees can maximize their size, height, and age. These essential strategies help old-growth forests thrive and help newer redwoods to become the old-growth of the future.

Learn more: sempervirens.org/climate-action



Three Years After the CZU Fire

It has been a busy three years since the devastating CZU fire of 2020. With your support, we have been at the forefront of efforts to improve policy, generate investment, establish programs, and build partnerships that will keep Santa Cruz mountain forests resilient and prepared for the next wildfire. Wildfire has led to greater investments and partnership in forest management. Decimated infrastructure led to long-sought conservation wins, like the removal of the Mill Creek dam at San Vicente Redwoods. And a spotlight on reimagining Big Basin has led to renewed investment in—and vision for—park management and visitor services.

Here are three other ways progress has been made to prepare for fire once more:

Forests and Partnerships:

Tens of thousands of acres of redwood and other forests were scarred by intense wildfire. In partnership with local land managers, foresters, ecologists, and agencies, we are pursuing a comprehensive, ecosystem-wide approach to forest health, boosting the ability of forests throughout the region to store carbon. Healthy forests can capture an additional 1.1 metric tons of carbon by 2050.

Nature-Based Solutions and Policy:

When investments and policies align, nature can help protect communities. For example, state funding in California's budget will help lands retain water—reducing the speed that water runs off the land by as much as 80%. This also improves watershed quality and helps forests survive the increasingly drastic predicted drought and flood patterns ahead. Our conservation lands safeguard our communities.

Science and Programs:

Sempervirens Fund has always taken a science-first approach to land stewardship. At San Vicente Redwoods, in partnership with agencies and partners, and guided by Indigenous experts, we are expanding the pace and scale of controlled fire introduced to the landscape and intensifying efforts to reduce excess vegetation and remove fuels from the forest floor. These programs will improve conditions for the forests and for the people who live nearby.

Learn more about how we care for redwood forests: sempervirens.org/stewardship

Setting Me at Ease



Most of our Forest Sustainers—donors who give consistently, often monthly—are like Chris Decker: giving to protect what is so very dear to them.

Chris has been living, and visiting redwoods, in the Bay Area all of her life. “I went to Armstrong Redwoods in Marin when I was probably 11 or 12 years old, and I’ve been hooked on redwoods ever since.

“I find incredible peace gazing up into them. It is intimidating to think how long they’ve been around.” Chris visits redwood forests every chance she can get. In her late teens she moved from

Castro Valley to the Santa Cruz mountains and began exploring Castle Rock, Butano, and Henry Cowell State Parks.

“My first discovery of redwood rings was on the railroad trip through Felton. Butano and Henry Cowell are my favorite spots. I feel like I’m seeing majesty looking up into the redwoods.”

But Chris is seeing the effects of climate change. “Climate change is eating away at the southern end of the range, and I want to be part of an organization that is working to best keep these trees around.”

Chris volunteered to address envelopes for Sempervirens Fund back in 1989 and has been a supporter ever since. Redwoods are a constant source of joy.

“One of my farthest trips up the coast—I was wandering through the redwoods with tripods and cameras and gazing over the azaleas and ferns, and the sunbeam that came through the redwoods, and I felt blessed in the moment. Whatever else is going on in the world, it sets me at ease.”

Join Chris in supporting Sempervirens Fund:
sempervirens.org/donate

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Relationships With Nature

The forest fuels our fascination. There is so much we can learn about, and from, nature. Together, we've pursued a deeper connection to the natural world that strengthens our commitment to protecting and sharing the redwood forests of the Santa Cruz mountains.

Here are resources and stories to sate your curiosity and provide invaluable learning to our shared commitment to protecting redwoods from an uncertain future.



BOOKS

ALL THAT THE RAIN PROMISES AND MORE: A HIP POCKET GUIDE TO WESTERN MUSHROOMS

David Arora's illustrated guide to identifying 200 Western mushrooms—whether edible, poisonous, or medicinal—by their key features continues to be our go-to for learning more about redwoods' underground allies.

EVER GREEN: SAVING BIG FORESTS TO SAVE THE PLANET

Economist John W. Reid and biologist Thomas E. Lovejoy join forces to make a compelling case and offer practical solutions for saving our largest forests to tackle the climate crisis.

sempervirens.org/read-watch

UNDER THE REDWOODS: ILLUSTRATING SCIENCE

Visual artist and science illustrator Jane Kim of Ink Dwell studio returns to discuss how she and her team illustrated Sempervirens Fund's Redwoods and Climate series.

sempervirens.org/under-the-redwoods

A TANGLED WEB: REDWOODS, COLONIALISM, EUGENICS, AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Mycologist Dr. Patricia J. Kaishian, Ph.D. writes about the troubling roots of the redwoods conservation movement and how mycology can inspire us towards reconciliation.

RIGHT RELATIONS

Sempervirens Fund staff joined a TOGETHER BAY AREA cohort for a nine-month program to build alliances with local Native American communities. The program was led by Redbud Resources Group, which offers programs to become valued partners with Native peoples and their communities: redbudresourcegroup.org

sempervirens.org/learn

REDWOODS AND CLIMATE: LIVING IN A CHANGED CLIMATE

Explore research about how climate change is already affecting redwoods across their range, and how it informs our new plan to save redwoods before it's too late.

BEYOND THE BLOOM: SUPERBLOOMS IN THE SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAINS

Our resident biologist and natural resource manager Beatrix Jimenéz-Helsley takes us on a photo essay into the rarer side of the superbloom and a phenomenon that may be the saving grace for redwoods as our climate continues to change.

THE SEEDLING SAGA

The saga of these seedlings, five years in the making, offers a look at the deceptively difficult process and planning that come before planting and the seemingly endless problems that stand between their roots and restoring native habitat.

sempervirens.org/news-stories



Cultural Research at San Vicente Redwoods

Understanding, and reckoning with, the past is crucial for ensuring a redwood forest's future. Thanks to you, we work with experts to get a full view of a forest's resources, including cultural and historic artifacts, to best care for it.

Land known as San Vicente Redwoods was tended by Indigenous Peoples for millennia until they were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands. The devastation of the 2020 CZU fire presented an opportunity in the exposed forest floor to survey reemerging plants, and to help Amah Mutsun tribal members look for clues for how and where the Awaswas-speaking peoples lived on and cared for this land.

In 2022, U.C. Berkeley researchers formed a crew with several experienced tribal members working with the Amah Mutsun Land Trust through the Native Stewardship Corps. Lupe from Fresno, Nico from Lake County, and Marcella from Las Vegas, coming from different points on the compass, each traveled many hours to reconnect with their ancestral home and each other.

"We get to see what our ancestors were doing and eating, and what tools they had," Lupe said. So, they loaded up survey equipment, gear, and supplies into special vehicles to get to ancestral sites—difficult to reach even with guides—in the vastness of San Vicente Redwoods.

Learn how looking into the past can better protect redwoods' future at

sempervirens.org/cultural-research



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