

# Mountain Echo

THE NEWSLETTER OF SEMPERVIRENS FUND | WINTER 2024



## Donor-Powered Conservation in the Lompico Headwaters

**With your support, we work to preserve clean drinking water and restore forests to health and resiliency. And thanks to you, we have great news: 120 acres of redwood forests feeding the Lompico headwaters have been permanently protected.**

This effort is extra special. Anonymous private landowners donated a conservation easement to Sempervirens Fund in December 2023, ensuring that these forested lands will be forever protected from development, subdivision, and commercial timber harvest. The owners will also continue to access the landscape, known as Isabel Upani, in the Upper Zayante watershed.

This region of Santa Cruz County near Felton has a long history of clearcutting and logging, and Isabel Upani includes a creek listed as “impaired” under the Clean Water Act. This conservation success combines with other Sempervirens Fund-owned land to establish a 645-acre conservation and restoration refuge for redwoods, waterways, and at-risk species.

Our ambitious stewardship plan will improve the health and resilience of the lands’ forest habitats and waterways, reducing fuels, restoring ponds, and managing vegetation.

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## Chasing Marbled Murrelets

On September 11, 2023, a hiker at Portola Redwoods State Park spotted an endangered marbled murrelet, not only in the forest but on the ground. About four and a half hours after the first sighting, under the cover of night and a blanket of fog, specialists released the bird into the gentle surf east of Pigeon Point Lighthouse.

It's extraordinary to see a marbled murrelet in the redwoods. But the reason may surprise you. Despite being an endangered species, it isn't their scarcity that makes the encounter so rare.

Sometimes described as a "potato with wings," the endangered seabird is shockingly fast—up to 100 miles per hour—and elusive. In fact, when training to monitor for marbled murrelets in the wee hours of the morning when the birds are most active in the forest, Sempervirens Fund's

Natural Resource Manager Beatrix Jiménez-Helsley says "Monitors are not supposed to sit or even lean on anything so they can be most alert for any potential sounds of wing beats or calls, because the birds themselves are usually too fast and too well-camouflaged to be seen."

Thanks to a local network of conservationists, we know more than ever before about where marbled murrelets are and how they survive. And thanks to supporters like you, Sempervirens Fund can pursue a comprehensive, ecosystem-wide approach to purchasing, protecting, and stewarding prime marbled murrelet habitat.

Read the story of this rare encounter and how monitoring marbled murrelets can support these dwindling species:

[sempervirens.org/chasing-murrelets](https://sempervirens.org/chasing-murrelets)

### HOW CAN WE INSPIRE YOU?

We want to hear how our storytelling can match your support for protecting and caring for redwoods. Take the survey: [sempervirens.org/survey](https://sempervirens.org/survey)

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"We are ecstatic that the landowners pursued their vision with us for a permanently protected—and cared for—landscape," said Laura McLendon, Sempervirens Fund's director of land conservation. The Isabel Upani lands include more than 67 acres of redwood forest (mostly second-growth trees with some residual old-growth redwoods), including Douglas fir, oak woodland, mixed hardwood, maritime chaparral, chamise scrubland, and riparian woodland.

The donated easement exemplifies an emerging model between conservation groups and private landowners to preserve land from development

and address the ongoing climate crisis. This partnership with these landowners aligns with President Biden's goal, and Governor Newsom's 30x30 Initiative, to conserve 30% of lands and waterways by 2030 through collaborations that center on conservation, resiliency, and inclusion.

"Redwoods sequester more carbon than any plant species in the world, and as we continue to stand up against an aggressively changing climate, conservation partnerships like this one are more critical than ever" said Sara Barth, Sempervirens Fund's executive director.

Learn more: [sempervirens.org/isabel-upani](https://sempervirens.org/isabel-upani)

## Memorializing a Love for Redwoods



For Bruce and Dawn Grench, visiting California always meant spending time outdoors—and most often, that meant spending time under the redwoods.

The couple raised their four children in Missouri, where Dawn still lives. Bruce's father, Herb Grench, was the first general manager of Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District. When the family would visit, Dawn, Bruce, and the kids would venture out with Herb, and his wife, Norma, into Midpen parks and redwoods throughout the Bay Area.

"Redwoods—their majesty and beauty—amaze me. There's an immediate calmness that comes over you when you are in their presence," says Dawn.

When Bruce passed away at the young age of 54, memorializing his life—and the peace he found in redwoods and nature—led the family to Sempervirens Fund and our Dedicated Tree and Grove program. In 2016, they dedicated a grove to Bruce in Castle Rock State Park.

"We wanted the opportunity to give Bruce a resting place where he found the most peace in this world," says Dawn.

Redwoods hold a special place in her heart. "They are resilient. With all the forest fires, the redwoods, of all the trees, withstood the impacts the best," added Dawn. "I continue to be interested in helping Sempervirens Fund with the fight to protect them. The staff are dedicated and filled with purpose, and that means a lot to me."

Learn more about all the ways you can honor someone in your life and support Sempervirens Fund: [sempervirens.org/tribute](https://sempervirens.org/tribute)



# A Photographic Perspective on Resurgence

Our community's support ensures that Sempervirens staff have been able to thoughtfully monitor and respond to nature's resilience in the forests' recovery from wildfire and drought. We also know that documentation and insight come in many forms. From photographer Ian Bornarth's new essay, here's a peek at a photographer's perspective on the resurgence of life in redwood forests in the wake of wildfire.

See Ian's stunning photography and read the entire essay at [sempervirens.org/ian-bornarth](https://sempervirens.org/ian-bornarth)



"In October and November 2020, I found a stark grey landscape of dusty soil, burned trees, and little to no underbrush. The ash and dust on the ground had a fine consistency and fluffed out around our footsteps as we walked."



"During the first summer, plentiful sun spurred growth of the understory as more ferns and more wildflowers appeared, including irises, lupine, and many others. The seed bank in the soil was sprouting to life again ... However, some areas that were severely affected were still barren and stark with little growth, as the return of life was not evenly spread ... The new growth offered a lively contrast against charred tree trunks in the recent burn scars."



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