

Mountain Echo

THE NEWSLETTER OF SEMPERVIRENS FUND | SUMMER 2024



Securing Land for Big Basin's New Future

When wildfire tore through Big Basin Redwoods State Park, San Vicente Redwoods, and nearby communities in 2020, passionate redwoods supporters like you were stunned, but steadfast: Redwoods would heal, and our favorite destinations would return. And thanks to your support—from donating more than \$600,000 for emergency recovery efforts to helping Sempervirens Fund raise well over \$4 million for priority acquisitions—Big Basin's path to a new future is bright. California State Parks has reopened key trails and established its vision for welcoming future generations of redwood lovers to the state's oldest park.

At the eastern edge of Big Basin, which protects the largest continuous grove of redwood forest and

old-growth redwoods south of San Francisco, lies the Saddle Mountain Conservation Area. Its ridges both protected the nearby town of Boulder Creek and helped trees survive on the edge of the 2020 CZU Fire that tore through Big Basin.

In April 2024, we celebrated key milestones in the park's recovery. We completed two land acquisitions at Saddle Mountain, rounding out three years and 194 acres of conservation in the area. Over the coming months, we will begin the important process of selling the land to California State Parks. Combined, the properties establish an important new edge to the park's conservation of old-growth redwoods and expand the land available for new facilities to be established to welcome visitors to Big Basin. *Continued on page 3.*



Policy on the Move

State and county policy that would establish new tools and resources for conservation and stewardship of redwoods in the Santa Cruz mountains is advancing. And thanks to our supporters' commitment to redwoods conservation, we pursue policies, funding, and measures that would advance our mission and goals.

2024 could prove to be a consequential year for conservation in the Santa Cruz mountains. Sempervirens Fund's new director of government relations agrees. Rachel Dann joined the organization in 2023, just in time for the pursuit of a statewide climate bond, a Santa Cruz County measure to protect special places against the persistent threat of wildfires and climate change, and legislative policy to respond to the CZU fire with streamlined sale of land to California State Parks.

"Protecting the redwoods is not just about preserving these majestic trees. It's about safeguarding a vital part of our planet's ecosystem and heritage for future generations," said Dann. "We are excited that 2024 could make the difference in accelerating the conservation community's commitments to redwoods, resiliency, and clean water."

In April, we asked our community to raise its voice in support of these policies, and you responded! You took more than 8,000 actions, and key legislation to support the sale of land to Big Basin, Año Nuevo, and Butano State Parks passed a critical committee vote during Earth Week.

Policy also helps ensure donor support is leveraged. For example, donor gifts to support the easement purchased to protect Camp Jones Gulch were doubled by public funds. And recently, the camp was selected along with other nearby parks to receive a \$1.5M state forest health grant. Win, win, win!

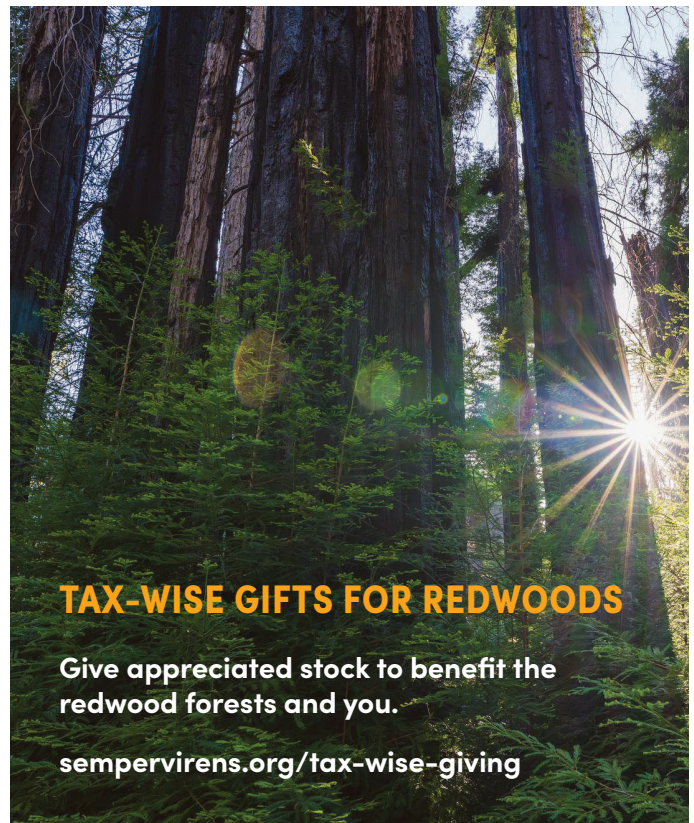
We hope you will stay informed and active in supporting these important policies and measures in 2024. Learn about all of our policy priorities: sempervirens.org/action-center

"Protecting the redwoods is not just about preserving these majestic trees. It's about safeguarding a vital part of our planet's ecosystem and heritage for future generations." –Rachel Dann

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Sale of land to California State Parks can be challenging, but a bill in the state legislature, AB 2103, would ease the path for the sale of lands to parks—Big Basin, Año Nuevo, and Butano State Parks—recovering from the CZU fire. The bill's author, Assemblymember Gail Pellerin (D- Santa Cruz), said with this bill, we can “provide State Parks timely transfers of land... to speed up the land acquisition process and permanently protect lands for conservation, cultural, or recreational purposes.”

Conservation and stewardship of coast redwood forests in the Santa Cruz mountains began at Big Basin 124 years ago by your fellow supporters. As we look ahead to the next century, we know that the road to recovery from wildfire is also the path to a resilient redwood forest ecosystem for centuries to come. Learn more about the conservation at Saddle Mountain:
sempervirens.org/saddle-mountain



A Love Story Among Redwoods



Dell and Dale Petersen are prolific among the trail crew members working in the redwoods. Born and raised in Daly City, Dale joined the Big Basin Volunteer Trail Crew in 1979, and Dell joined in 1989. When asked how many miles of trail they've worked on, Dell says, “Most of them. Whatever the trail mileage is at Big Basin, triple it.”

When not maintaining trails, they might be found leading hikes at Castle Rock State Park or serving

as docent ambassadors for Sempervirens Fund on Roaring Camp Railroads' redwood train rides. And they credit Sempervirens Fund with “saving [their] marriage... ceremony.”

When a storm washed out the road to Little Basin—a retreat and event area at Big Basin—a week before their wedding in 2006, Sempervirens Fund rallied to open a dining hall on a protected camp property nearby.

As volunteers and donors for decades, Dell and Dale have blazed their share of trails, but the work at Big Basin now, after the CZU fire, is some of the hardest. “We are essentially blazing entirely new trails,” says Dale. They are concerned about climate change and its impacts on redwoods but remain hopeful that through conservation, we can “protect as much as possible,” Dale says.

Learn more about all the ways you can support Sempervirens Fund: **sempervirens.org/support**

A Small World Among Giants

Did you know we host a free monthly webinar dedicated to exploring the marvelous world of redwoods? When we launched Under the Redwoods in 2020, we quickly learned that like us, you are also curious about all the amazing ways redwoods and their natural communities are special.

In 2024, we began the year focusing on water, fungi, and lichen and learned some surprising facts.



WATERSHEDS

Kellyx Nelson joined us from the San Mateo Resource Conservation District to talk about watersheds. We learned that wherever you are on the Earth, you are in a watershed, where water is draining. The Mississippi River watershed drains about 40% of the continental United States. There are more than 80 watersheds in San Mateo County alone.

Hear more from Kellyx about the essential role of watersheds in conservation: sempervirens.org/redwood-watersheds



FUNGI

Mycologist Maya Elson joined us from the UC Santa Cruz mycelial team to talk about fungi in the redwoods. We learned that “a lot of mushroom identification is rotting log identification.” For example, they look very similar, but orange jelly spot likes Douglas fir and witch’s butter likes oaks.

Maya also teamed up with us on a Fungi Guide for the Santa Cruz Mountains: sempervirens.org/fun-guide



LICHEN

Dr. Rikke Reese Næsborg joined us from the Santa Barbara Botanical Garden to talk about lichen. We learned that lichen are not a single organism, but rather a little ecosystem consisting of various fungi, algae, and bacteria living together in symbiosis. And our southern redwoods host more lichen than those up north.

Learn more lichen and its role in redwoods ecology: sempervirens.org/lichen



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Paper: Printed on Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certified paper containing 10% post-consumer waste.

Photos: Russ Ferretti-Hoyle, Allison Krauss, Orenda Randuch, and Rebecca Thomas.

Design: shirleycreative.com



Trails and Wellness

A Trails Prescription Program for the Santa Cruz Mountains

There are so many places to explore in the Santa Cruz mountains, and so many reasons to venture into nature. But believe it or not, visiting parks can be intimidating for some. Do they belong? Can they manage to make their way along natural trails? Can they even get there and back?

Over the past few years, especially as we have witnessed the important role parks play in our personal health and wellness, we have explored the health benefits of time spent in nature. This year, we have joined with our new Wellness Advisor, Dr. Suzanne Bartlett Hackenmiller, to curate an introduction to parks in the Santa Cruz mountains, with a focus on the health benefits of visiting easy-rated trails in the region.

We invite you to learn more about exploring parks and trails specifically to boost your own wellness.

Flip the page for previews of our first five Trail Prescriptions, and see the full details at sempervirens.org/trails-rx.

Destinations to Explore



REDWOOD GROVE LOOP TRAIL, HENRY COWELL REDWOODS STATE PARK

A flat, shady, and extremely accessible looping trail through old-growth redwoods.

Length: 0.9 miles round trip | **Rated:** Easy* | **Elevation Gain:** 42 feet

Sample Invitation: Listen Up—Focus your hearing on sounds close by, and listen for sounds farther up in the canopies of these tall trees. How high up can you hear?

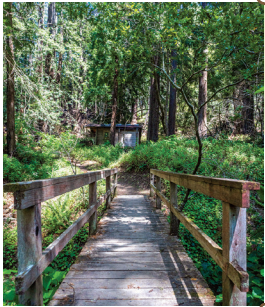


REDWOOD LOOP TRAIL, BIG BASIN REDWOODS STATE PARK

A flat, looping trail through ancient trees recovering from wildfire, over sometimes uneven ground, at the heart of the oldest California State Park.

Length: 0.7 miles round trip | **Rated:** Easy* | **Elevation Gain:** 42 feet

Sample Invitation: Signs of New Life—Look closely at the trees around you and notice signs of life that show nature in recovery from a stressful event, like wildfire.

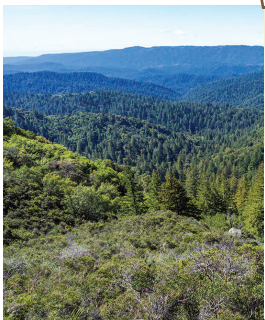


SIX BRIDGES TRAIL, BUTANO STATE PARK

A classic, natural forested trail with bridges, leading to a redwood grove.

Length: 2.2 miles out and back | **Rated:** Easy* | **Elevation Gain:** 42 feet

Sample Invitation: Be the Water—At any bridge, can you trace the water's path to and from this point? Close your eyes and imagine water gathering to reach this point.



CASTLE ROCK FALLS TRAIL, CASTLE ROCK STATE PARK

A rugged, forested trail to waterfalls, with views of the Santa Cruz mountains.

Length: 1.3 miles round trip | **Rated:** Easy* | **Elevation Gain:** 320 feet

Sample Invitation: Feel the Difference—Are you surprised by the feel and temperature of the sandstone when you touch it?



ATKINSON BLUFF TRAIL, AÑO NUEVO STATE PARK

A seaside-to-sand dunes journey in this ocean-to-ridgeline treasure.

Length: 2.9 mile trail loop | **Rated:** Easy* | **Elevation Gain:** 36 feet

Sample Invitation: Ocean in Motion—Close your eyes and listen for the surf, breaking waves, wind, and ocean spray. Is there any rhythm that emerges?