

Redwood Nation Earth First!

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Yes!!! Mendocino County's Noyo River ancient redwoods have finally been saved. Hallelujah and pass the hat. You may already have read the account in the S.F. Chronicle's Sunday front page spread back in October, announcing the property's purchase by Save the Redwoods League (SRL) from Willits Redwood Company (WRC). Now we can spill the story behind the scenes: the role of Earth First! in coalition with the Redwood Chapter Sierra Club, The Willits Environmental Center (WEC), the Willits Railway Society, and the support of a host of redwood-loving community members, in preparing the way for the protection of these forests.

First, a brief recap: these trees, many older than Methuselah, are the last of their kind along the upper Noyo River and constitute about a third of all remaining old growth in the watershed. Rising like sentinels across some 123 acres of steep slopes, they tower above the switchbacks of the beloved Willits Skunk Train. Home to bear, cougar, grouse and salmon, this forest will *not* be logged, as long as SRL comes up with \$7 million by April 1, 2011. The conservation group has announced a public campaign to raise the funds and has already received \$1.5 million from an anonymous donor.

Acquisition of the entire 426-acre parcel by SRL represents the culmination of a thirty year effort to preserve the tract throughout a succession of multiple ownerships and timber harvest plans, most recently by Louisiana Pacific (L-P), Hawthorne Timber and, the latest, Willits Redwood Company.



In the 1980's, adjacent property owners and dedicated forest conservationists, Hans and Hannah Burkhart, succeeded in implementing an informal "gentlemen's agreement" with then-owner Georgia Pacific to spare the big ones near the tracks. This agreement broke down under L-P'S less gentlemanly management in the 90's. Law suits were readied and Earth First! activists festooned the Skunk Train line with banners. One, the classic "Save the Old Growth" banner, still hangs there today.

L-P sold to Hawthorne Timber and left town before it got around to pulverizing the place. Hawthorne got another THP approved but caved under community resistance and judicial displeasure. In 2007, WRC, the only currently operating old growth mill on the North Coast to survive the Timber Wars, bought the parcel from Hawthorne for a cool \$1.8 mil. In 2008, WRC co-owners Bruce Burton and Chris Baldo filed yet another THP. This plan, touted as "light touch forestry", apparently assumed a few dozen missing old growth trees wouldn't be noticed, even though they planned to haul the logs through the middle of town on the train.

In August, 2009, over fifty train & tree enthusiasts rode the Willits Skunk line to view the area proposed for logging. CAL-FIRE received more public comments on the THP than for any other in the agency's regional history. At the crowded final hearing, Judi Bari's famous quote was read into the public record: "These trees do not belong to us, they belong to the future."

The plan was approved. A lawsuit by attorney Paul Carrol was poised for filing as the thirty day deadline loomed. Nonviolence trainings and climbing workshops were being scheduled. But then, a strange thing happened: Bruce and Chris agreed to talk to four of us, including Linda Perkins (Redwood Chapter Sierra Club), Mary Korte (Noyo resident), Ellen Drell (WEC) and me, (EF!). Under a "tolling agreement" they promised to hold off logging for one year in return for our promise not to sue. This gamble bought us the time we needed to search for a suitable buyer with an acceptable offer.

Initially, Burton and Baldo were unwilling sellers. To them, the parcel represented the dream of a lifetime, a chance to play out the profitable fantasies of gentlemen loggers with forestry degrees, an opportunity to supply the local mill with rare, high quality logs from their own lands. But our team held firmly to the principle that logging old growth is unsustainable by definition and fundamentally non-negotiable. We saw three options: sue, sit or settle; if negotiations fell apart or the lawsuit failed we would just have to hug some trees. Whether it was the potential for a legal case, the possibility of protests or the sight of Mary on bended knee, her heartfelt pleas and rosaries, or perhaps the cumulative effect of them all, at a certain point Bruce and Chris turned a corner. They became willing sellers.

While we talked, the "conservation-organization-that-could-not-be-named," mentioned in our last newsletter, warmed up their anonymous donors and approached WRC with an offer. Just as the tolling agreement expired, Save the Redwoods League and WRC reached a sales agreement for a total price of \$9 million.

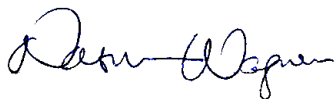
SRL assures us they can cover the bill, but would appreciate the community's participation in small local fundraisers for the acquisition. SRL Director Suzanne Moss thanks us profusely for our efforts and says our involvement was essential. Funds will be set aside for a much needed sediment prevention and road stabilization project and the property will be managed to promote old forest characteristics in previously logged areas.

Meanwhile, the Willits Bypass so desired by Caltrans has withered away (for now), as the project failed to receive a final, key permit before its funding ran out, whew! Further north, the Richardson Grove 101 widening project may be heating up in early 2011, after being stalled by EPIC's lawsuit seeking a full EIR among other things. Caltrans says they're "ready to begin doing some work" by February, 1011, pending court challenges.

We support the intrepid tree sitters who, despite cold, wet weather in Humboldt County, are beginning a third year of aerial occupation in the McKay tract, near Eureka. There they are protecting large second growth and scattered old growth redwoods. In Jacoby Creek, another urban-forest interface between Arcata and Eureka, a second year of protest is keeping the spotlight focused on Green Diamond's brutal clearcutting practices and herbicide use. You can find out much more by going to ef!humboldt.com. Check it out!

Despite eight years of lawsuits against EF!, our work to inform you and fund forest activism was never stopped by the judges. It turns out that our approach to protect the civil rights of activists and assist their free speech is immune from government and industry attempts to shut us down. This works. Please consider sending a larger gift this year. We fulfilled more requests for support this last year than the previous two years combined. Since this project is staffed solely by volunteers your do-re-mi goes right to the heart of the conflict.

Yours for the forest,



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Save
Richardson
Grove!