

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation

April 23, 2026

**REDWOODS RISING PROJECT, PHASE III**

Project No. 19-022-02

Project Manager: Joel Gerwein

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$1,000,000 to Save the Redwoods League to undertake a portion of the third phase of the Redwoods Rising Project, consisting of thinning 100-150 acres of forest to improve forest health and fish and wildlife habitat in Del Norte County.

**LOCATION:** Greater Mill Creek Watershed in Del Norte Coast Redwood State Park, 6 miles southeast of Crescent City in Del Norte County

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EXHIBITS

- Exhibit 1: [Project Location Map](#)
- Exhibit 2: [December 19, 2019 Redwoods Rising staff recommendation](#)
- Exhibit 3: [June 7, 2021 Redwoods Rising staff recommendation](#)
- Exhibit 4: [Site photographs](#)
- Exhibit 5: [Final Initial Study-Negative Declaration/Environmental Assessment](#)
- Exhibit 6: [Project Letters](#)

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution and findings.

Resolution:

The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes a grant of an amount not to exceed one million dollars (\$1,000,000) to Save the Redwoods League (“the grantee”) to undertake a portion of the third phase of the Redwoods Rising Project, consisting of thinning 100-150 acres of forest to improve forest health and fish and wildlife habitat in Del Norte County.

Prior to commencement of the project, the grantee shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (Executive Officer) the following:

1. A detailed work program, schedule, and budget.
2. Names and qualifications of any contractors to be retained in carrying out the project.
3. A plan for acknowledgement of Conservancy funding and Proposition 68 as the source of that funding.
4. Evidence that all permits and approvals required to implement the project have been obtained.
5. Evidence that the grantee has entered into agreements sufficient to enable the grantee to implement, operate, and maintain the project.

Findings:

Based on the accompanying staff recommendation and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed authorization is consistent with Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, regarding the enhancement of regionally important salmonid habitat.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the current Conservancy Project Selection Criteria.
3. The Save the Redwoods League is a nonprofit organization organized under section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code.

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## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

### **PROJECT SUMMARY:**

Staff recommends the Conservancy authorize a \$1,000,000 grant to Save the Redwoods League (SRL) to undertake a portion of the third phase of the Redwoods Rising Project, consisting of thinning 100-150 acres of forest to improve forest health and fish and wildlife habitat in Del Norte County (the "project"). The project work is located in the Greater Mill Creek (GMC) Watershed in Del Norte Coast Redwoods State Park in Del Norte County (Exhibit 1).

The Conservancy provided \$3,000,000 to support Phase I of the Redwoods Rising Project, including restoration activities in the GMC in 2019 (Exhibit 2) and \$1,000,000 to support Phase II of Redwoods Rising Project, including restoration activities in the Greater Prairie Creek Watershed (GPC) in 2021 (Exhibit 3).

The project is one component of the third phase of the Redwoods Rising Project. Announced in 2018, the Redwoods Rising Project is a landscape-scale forest restoration effort across multiple watersheds through a collaborative and integrated program designed to accelerate the development of late seral stage forest conditions in previously logged forests and enhance salmonid habitat. The Redwoods Rising Project has been planned and is being implemented through a cooperative agreement among SRL, the National Park Service (NPS) and the California

Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) to restore up to 80,000 acres of redwood ecosystems in Redwood National and State Parks (RNSP) over the coming decades. The RNSP are a complex consisting of Redwood National Park, Del Norte Coast Redwoods State Park, Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park, and Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park, managed jointly by State Parks and the NPS. Through tree thinning and road treatments, the Redwoods Rising Project will enable SRL and its RNSP partners to accelerate the development of old-growth forest conditions and associated biodiversity, reduce catastrophic fire risk, and improve the biological health of one of the most productive coho salmon fisheries in the Pacific Northwest.

The project consists of conducting forest thinning on 100-150 acres to reduce stand density, redistribute growth among the remaining trees, and enhance forest health. Different thinning treatments will be selected in the field, based on site-specific conditions, taking into consideration factors such as the need to shift species composition in areas where it has been altered by previous logging activities and the need to maintain slope stability where thinning operations occur on steep terrain. For example, some sites will be thinned by removing smaller, suppressed or intermediate trees, while in other sites, co-dominant crown class trees will be removed to benefit adjacent co-dominant trees and the forest overall. In many areas, biomass will be removed from thinning sites to reduce fire hazard, encourage understory development, and increase carbon sequestration. All timber revenue generated by the sale of merchantable timber removed as part of the project will be reinvested directly into the project, per RNSP's mandate, primarily to fund future forest restoration treatments.

The coast redwood is the tallest and amongst the oldest trees in the world. They grow in a fragmented band from the coast of central California to southern Oregon. Logging and clearcutting, beginning in the nineteenth century, destroyed coast redwood forests on an industrial scale. These substantial timber harvests, and related road construction conducted over the landscape, increased erosion and the delivery of sediment to stream channels such as Mill Creek. Sediment delivery to stream channels from roads and road networks has been extensively documented and is recognized as a significant impediment to the health of salmonid habitat and overall watershed health. In addition to the immediate physical impacts of logging, forest regeneration after clearcutting created unnaturally dense forests with high competition among trees for light and water, reduced genetic diversity, impaired ability to store carbon or provide ample habitat for native species, and increased catastrophic fire risk (Exhibit 4).

The Redwoods Rising Project, Phase III, includes activities that are outside the scope of this project and are funded by sources other than the Conservancy, including: 1) thinning an additional 350 acres of forest in the GPC, and 2) completing road treatments for between 10 and 15 miles of old logging roads in the GPC and GMC. Road treatments will reduce erosion and sedimentation, remove fish passage barriers, and enhance public access. Road treatments activities will include: outslowing roads, retiring roads, replacing culverts, and improving stream crossings to reduce erosion and remove barriers to fish passage. Roads have been identified as the greatest threat to aquatic resources in RNSP. Combined, the GMC and GPC watersheds have several hundred miles of abandoned haul roads and associated skid trails and over 630 legacy stream crossings. Repair and reoccupation of some logging roads is initially necessary to facilitate access for thinning treatments. Additional benefits include enhancing accessibility to

park landscapes for recreation, visitor experience, law enforcement, fire, facilities, and natural resource staff.

Following implementation, Redwoods Rising Project sites will be managed subject to RNSP's existing management plans and principles in perpetuity. Operations and maintenance will continue to be conducted by NPS and State Parks, in conjunction with the rest of RNSP, with funding from both agencies' annual operating budgets.

The Redwoods Rising Project will create 110-200 jobs annually across the project area. Funds from sources other than the Conservancy will support the Redwoods Rising apprenticeship program, which trains College of the Redwoods and California State Polytechnic University Humboldt students in ecological restoration, adding a valuable workforce development component to Redwoods Rising.

**Site Description:** The project area is located within the GMC Watershed, approximately 25,000 acres within Del Norte Coast Redwoods State Park that includes both the Mill Creek and Rock Creek watersheds. Both Mill and Rock Creeks are tributaries to the Smith River. The project area is immediately upstream of the old-growth redwood stands in Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park and south and east of the severely disadvantaged community of Crescent City. Most of the project area was intensively harvested between 1908 and 1999. A network of administrative roads is present, along with many miles of abandoned haul roads and skid trails, reflective of many decades of intensive timber management. Although the park is home to old-growth redwoods, today nearly the entire area proposed for restoration is comprised of second-growth redwood and Douglas-fir, as well as spruce and alder, seeded at extremely high densities (more than 10 times that of typical mature forests) in anticipation of future timber harvesting prior to park establishment; progression towards late-seral habitat is hindered and species diversity is reduced. The mixed understory includes tanoak, madrone, red alder, big leaf maple, and California bay. Ground cover is dense, with a wide range of species. The landscape is diverse and provides essential habitat for wildlife, including threatened, endangered, and sensitive species, such as foothill yellow-legged frog, Humboldt marten, marbled murrelet, northern spotted owl, willow flycatcher, steelhead trout, and coho salmon.

SRL, NPS, and State Parks entered into a Memorandum of Agreement on April 27, 2018, to collaboratively implement the Redwoods Rising Project in the RNSP.

**Grant Applicant Qualifications:** SRL has protected more than 200,000 acres of land and helped create 66 parks and reserves. SRL has the fiscal capacity and expertise to conduct the proposed project on time and on budget. SRL will implement the project in partnership with State Parks and the NPS, continuing the Redwoods Rising partnership that has made this effort successful since its inception. Redwoods Rising is collaboratively managed by a leadership team, which includes high-level staff representatives from all three partner organizations. Staff supporting Redwoods Rising have decades of experience. Since the inception of Redwoods Rising, the partnership has dramatically increased the pace and scale of restoration in RNSP. To date, Redwoods Rising has treated more than 4,875 acres of second-growth forest, removed or improved more than 94 miles of failing roads, and restored more than 5.4 miles of stream channel.

SRL successfully managed past Conservancy grants for Redwoods Rising work in the GMC and GPC project areas (Exhibits 2 and 3).

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria, last updated on September 23, 2021, in the following respects:

**Selection Criteria**

**1. Extent to which the project helps the Conservancy accomplish the objectives in the Strategic Plan.**

See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Strategic Plan" section below.

**2. Project is a good investment of state resources.**

The project is feasible, as demonstrated by years of successful Redwoods Rising work described above. The project leverages federal and private funds, as well as partnerships and staff time contributions from NPS and State Parks. In addition, project costs have been reduced by the sale of merchantable timber generated by forest thinning and reinvestment of that revenue into additional restoration work. The project advances statewide goals and plans, as described in the "Promotion and implementation of state plans and policies" sections of Exhibits 2 and 3. The project advances California's 30x30 goals by contributing to the durable management of functional ecosystems. The project will enhance habitat for 110 special-status plant species, four sensitive natural communities, and four special-status anadromous fish species.

**3. Project includes a serious effort to engage tribes. Examples of tribal engagement include good faith, documented efforts to work with tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated to the project area.**

The project includes tribal consultation and collaboration. NPS and State Parks have developed government-to-government relationships with tribes through RNSP, both formally and informally, through close working relationships established over a long period. State Parks and NPS have ongoing tribal consultations and a variety of agreements, and RNSP works with the original stewards of RNSP lands to accelerate watershed recovery and long-term resilience for future generations. For example, for earlier phases of the overall Redwoods Rising Project, the Yurok Tribe Construction Corporation was retained to restore both aquatic and terrestrial habitat within the ancestral territories of the Yurok and Tolowa Peoples. Yurok Tribe Fisheries Program crews implemented large wood placement in Prairie Creek and built large log fencing to protect future riparian plantings from elk grazing. The GMC Picnic Road Removal and Instream Restoration Project was conducted by the Yurok Tribe Construction Corporation with guidance from Yurok Tribe Fisheries Program staff. SRL has an active cooperative agreement with the Yurok Tribe, which streamlines contracting processes to facilitate work on Redwoods Rising Project components through December 31, 2026.

**4. Project benefits will be sustainable or resilient over the project lifespan.**

Project activities will restore healthier forest ecosystems that will be more resilient to threats brought on by climate change over the next century. By restoring natural watershed processes and accelerating uneven-aged and late-seral conditions, greenhouse gas sequestration and storage potential will be greatly improved. Enhanced forest complexity will increase resilience to the acute and chronic impacts of climate change, including fire. Long term stewardship and monitoring will be conducted by NPS and State Parks, in conjunction with the rest of RNSP, with funding from both agencies' annual operating budgets.

**5. Project delivers multiple benefits and significant positive impact.**

The project will enhance forest ecosystem function, fish and wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, and water quality. The project will increase wildfire resilience, reducing wildfire risk for Crescent City, much of which is mapped as a Severely Disadvantaged Community. The Redwoods Rising Project has created local jobs in and around the GMC and GPC areas, which are mapped as Disadvantaged and Severely Disadvantaged Communities (DACs and SDACs) by the California Natural Resource Agency's Climate Bond Disadvantaged and Severely Disadvantaged Community Mapper. The Redwoods Rising Project includes an apprenticeship program that contributes to developing a restoration workforce.

**6. Project planned with meaningful community engagement and broad community support.**

The project includes community engagement and education. The Redwoods Rising Project team regularly engages the community, including DACs and SDACs, seeking public input and feedback, which is analyzed and incorporated into project design to support restoration goals. Community engagement includes social media, tabling at local events, and leading site tours for community organizations. The project enjoys broad support.

**PROJECT FINANCING**

<b>Coastal Conservancy</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>
<b>Project Total</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>

Conservancy funds for this project are expected to come from an appropriation to the Conservancy from the California Drought, Water, Climate, Coastal Protection, and Outdoors Access for All Act of 2018 (Proposition 68, California Public Resources Code Sections 80000-80173). Pursuant to Section 80120(e), the Conservancy may provide grants for the protection, restoration and improvement of coastal forest watersheds including managed forest lands, forest reserve areas, redwood forests and other forest types. The term "Protection" means "those actions necessary to prevent harm or damage to persons, property, or natural, cultural, and historic resources, actions to improve access to public open-space areas, or actions to allow the continued use and enjoyment of property or natural, cultural, and historic resources, and includes site monitoring, acquisition, development, restoration, preservation, and interpretation" (Section 80002(l)). This project is an eligible project type under Section 80120(e) because it will restore redwood forests and thereby improve water quality, increase coastal

watershed storage capacity, reduce fire risk, provide habitat for fish and wildlife and improve coastal forest health within the Del Norte Coast Redwood State Park and RNSP.

Unless specifically identified as “Required Match,” the other sources of funding and in-kind contributions described above are estimates. The Conservancy does not typically require matching funds or in-kind services, nor does it require documentation of expenditures from other funders or of in-kind services. Typical grant conditions require grantees to provide any funds needed to complete a project.

NPS staff and State Parks staff will provide significant staff time to implement the project.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

The project is consistent with Chapter 6 of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, as discussed in the December 19, 2019, staff recommendation in Exhibit 2.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY’S [2023-2027 STRATEGIC PLAN](#):**

Consistent with **Goal 1.1, Commit Funding to Benefit Systemically Excluded Communities**, the Redwoods Rising Project will provide 110-200 jobs in the project area, which is mapped as a Severely Disadvantaged Community. The project will also benefit the community by increasing public access opportunities and reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire.

Consistent with **Goal 3.2, Restore or Enhance Habitats**, the Redwoods Rising Project will enhance 300-500 acres of redwood forest.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE:**

On December 19, 2019, the Conservancy adopted findings under the California Environmental Quality Act for the Greater Mill Creek Ecosystem Restoration Project (GMC Project) based on the “Final Initial Study/Negative Declaration and Environmental Assessment for the Greater Mill Creek Ecosystem Restoration Project” (“Negative Declaration”) adopted by California State Parks on November 1, 2019 (Exhibit 2). The proposed project activities in the GMC are within the scope of the GMC Project. The GMC Project remains the same as described in the Negative Declaration and there are no changed circumstances or new information that triggers the requirement for additional documentation under CEQA. Therefore, no further review pursuant to CEQA is required.