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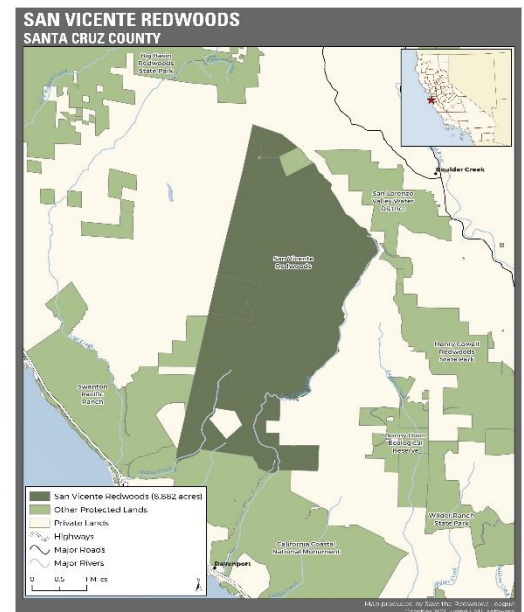
## San Vicente Redwoods Marks 10 Years as a “Living Laboratory” for Wildfire Resilience, Wildlife Protection and Ecosystem Restoration

*Some treated areas show more resilience after 2020 CZU Wildfire; other successes include dam removal, cultural discoveries and productive collaboration of four nonprofit conservation organizations*

**Davenport, Calif.** (October 27, 2021) – Located in the Santa Cruz Mountains, San Vicente Redwoods is proving to be a living laboratory of forest management, ecosystem restoration, sustainable timber harvesting and future public access since it was first protected in 2011.

In August 2020, the entire San Vicente Redwoods (SVR) property experienced fire in the CZU Lightning Complex wildfire, which ultimately burned across more than 85,000 acres in Santa Cruz and San Mateo Counties. Before the fire, 30 acres of the [property](#) had been treated using prescribed and cultural burns, and more than 15 miles of shaded fuel breaks had been created. The areas with prescribed burns appear to have weathered the blaze much better than the adjacent untreated parts of the property. More recent restoration progress came on September 21, 2021, when an obsolete dam was removed from Mill Creek, reopening habitat for endangered Coho salmon and other species for the first time in more than 100 years.

In December, four Bay Area-based nonprofit organizations will commemorate 10 years of collaborative conservation and restoration of the property. [Peninsula Open Space Trust \(POST\)](#) and [Sempervirens Fund](#) jointly own the property; [Save the Redwoods League](#) holds a permanent conservation easement on the land; and [Land Trust of Santa Cruz County](#) will develop and manage future public access to the property.



## **Permanent Protection and Future of San Vicente Redwoods**

The 8,852-acre San Vicente Redwoods is a model of environmental conservation. The area was permanently protected in 2011 by POST, Sempervirens Fund and Save the Redwoods League, after decades of intensive commercial logging in the last century left much of the forest in an unhealthy state. The threat of development also loomed. A conservation easement covering the property ensures ecologically sensitive land management practices, as well as sustainable harvesting in the working forest areas of the property.

The four nonprofit partners are restoring the property's 912-acre preservation reserve containing some old-growth redwoods; 3,951 acres of the previously logged forest; eight creeks; and a 320-acre former ranch that is home to redwoods, grasslands and oak woodlands. The partners also manage 3,669 acres of working forest to ensure sustainable timber harvesting and retain forestry jobs. The entire property includes critical habitat for many regionally significant species of wildlife, including endangered Coho salmon, marbled murrelet, pumas and peregrine falcons. Portions of the land boast stands of the threatened Anderson's manzanita. Future plans for the property include creating environmentally responsible public access in select areas.

"The opportunity to protect and restore such a substantial and biodiverse property as San Vicente Redwoods is rare," said **Walter Moore**, president of POST. "Conducting restoration at a landscape scale yields a multitude of benefits to all inhabitants of the region, from wildfire resiliency for adjacent communities to the plants and animals who seek to thrive. The four partners believe our work together at San Vicente Redwoods serves as a model for how to fulfill the national and state mandates for conserving at least 30 percent of our landscapes by 2030 as a way to combat climate change."

## **Wildfires and Restoration for Climate Resiliency**

Numerous projects are underway at San Vicente Redwoods to further the forest's restoration and increase resiliency in the landscape to the impacts of climate change. Based on the partners' previous work within this "living laboratory," the state of California has allocated \$3 million to expand 10 miles of shaded fuel breaks along the property's main road. This wildfire resilience project, which includes converting the road for all-season usage, will also provide essential firefighter access to help protect the nearby community of Bonny Doon.

With a nearly \$1 million grant from California's Wildlife Conservation Board, the partners have another 500 acres slated for restoration thinning in the coming year to reduce ladder fuels and catalyze the development of old growth conditions in the forest. A pre-CZU grant of \$1.3 million from CalFire for fire resiliency work has been extended and expanded to include post-fire recovery and additional research.

The forest's recovery from the CZU fire provides opportunities to understand the impact of wildfire on the property's ecosystems. In recent months, discoveries include the appearance of a fire-following, perennial flower never before recorded in Santa Cruz County and an extremely rare small, annual herb not documented in the County since the mid-1950s. A separate, ongoing forest health survey just launched by University of California, Berkeley, scientists and

the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band focuses on how the CZU wildfire impacted the presence and response of native plant species to canopy cover.

“As much as the CZU fire upended many activities at San Vicente Redwoods, it also created learning opportunities,” said **Paul Ringgold**, chief program officer of Save the Redwoods League. “As we revise our management and management plan for the property, we are focused on recovery, building future wildfire resilience and strategies for improving adaptivity to climate change.”

### **Watershed and Creek Restoration**

The [removal of a dam](#) from the San Vicente Redwoods’ Mill Creek in September frees sediment and water flow critical for endangered Coho salmon and steelhead trout spawning habitat.

“For more than a century the Mill Creek dam impeded steelhead trout and Coho salmon from reaching desperately needed spawning habitat,” said **Sara Barth**, Sempervirens Fund’s executive director. “Removing the dam was a missing piece in restoring creek flow and improving sediment conditions critical for both steelhead and the Coho salmon further downstream. A restored creek is also essential to the health and resilience of the surrounding redwoods and other nearby and downstream habitats at San Vicente.”

Other watershed and creek improvements on the property include work with the [Santa Cruz County Resource Conservation District](#) to [reintroduce woody debris](#) into San Vicente Creek to create the diversity of habitats needed for fish and other wildlife. A [multiyear effort to remove](#) the highly invasive and damaging non-native vine *Clematis vitalba* from San Vicente Creek is re-establishing ecosystem equilibrium for insects, animals and plants alike.

### **Collaborations with Indigenous Community**

The four organizations have also worked closely with the [Amah Mutsun Tribal Band](#) (AMTB), and the [Amah Mutsun Land Trust](#) (AMLT), formed in 2013 as a vehicle for tribal members to return as stewards to their land. In collaborating with these two entities, the partners’ goal is to inform current plans with the cultural practices and deep knowledge shared by the Indigenous peoples who stewarded this land for millennia. In 2016, the AMTB [reintroduced cultural fire](#) to the San Vicente landscape with the first ceremonial burn in more than 200 years. More recently, research has led to culturally significant ecological findings. There is evidence of frequent past land use and of plants cultivated by Indigenous peoples, suggesting that San Vicente Redwoods was among their seasonal homes.

### **Sustainable Timber Harvest**

Much of San Vicente Redwoods experienced clear-cut logging a century ago, which significantly damaged the land and created forests that are overly dense, with trees competing for resources and thus more susceptible to drought, wildfire and disease. More than 3,600 acres of San Vicente Redwoods remain working forest and have benefited from [sustainable timber harvesting](#). Harvests are conducted with both a conservation objective and a very specific commercial objective, ensuring that, over time, the growth rate and carbon sequestration of the forest are greater than what is removed. Sustainable practices promote forest health by

controlling tree density, fostering a healthy distribution of trees by size and age and offer climate benefits. This approach also protects wildlife habitat for all species, while continuing to support local jobs and mills.

### **Wildlife and Habitat Studies**

The conservation partners have undertaken numerous wildlife studies of San Vicente Redwoods' abundant biodiversity over the past decade. The endangered marbled murrelet, a seabird that nests exclusively in the crowns of old-growth trees, is difficult to track. The 2013 installation of audio monitoring devices not only [confirmed its presence](#) at SVR for the first time since 1914 but continues to monitor for this elusive species.

A [collaboration](#) with the [Santa Cruz Puma Project](#), launched in 2016, has yielded significant data about how the mountain lion population that is native to the Santa Cruz Mountains moves through and uses different areas of the property for communication, breeding and denning. This data is critical not only to understand and protect this significant species, but also to plan for public access trails on the property.

In addition, across the property, the regionwide Wildlife Picture Index project has positioned more than 50 motion-activated wildlife cameras – both near human activity and far from it – not only to help track numerous animal species, but also see how they respond to the presence of humans. Most of the cameras burned during the CZU wildfire and have since been reinstalled.

### **Commitment to Public Access**

Public access has been part of the vision for San Vicente Redwoods from the beginning. To balance recreation with the needs of the ecosystem, the partners have engaged experts and undertaken numerous studies, including the aforementioned wildlife cameras, to inform the placement of new trails, in an effort led by the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County in tandem with the other partners. Plans for new trails at San Vicente Redwoods were created in 2019 and are being revised in response to impacts of the CZU wildfire. Trail implementation is now anticipated to commence in 2022.

"Studies show that access to conserved land enhances our sense of connection to nature and desire to be good stewards of the land. But is it possible to have too much of a good thing?" said **Sarah Newkirk**, Land Trust executive director. "Our approach to creating public access is adaptive and leads with the science. When the fires impacted this area, we reacted by assessing the changes in ecological dynamics and modifying our access plans accordingly. This process can sometimes be frustrating for the public, but we are optimistic they will see the long-term benefits."

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### **About Peninsula Open Space Trust**

POST protects open space on the Peninsula and in the South Bay for the benefit of all. As a private nonprofit land trust, POST has been responsible for conserving more than 80,000 acres since its founding in 1977. POST works with private landowners and public agencies to connect people and nature. Visit [openspacetrust.org](https://openspacetrust.org) for more information.

### About Sempervirens Fund

California's first land trust, Sempervirens Fund protects and permanently preserves redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) forests, wildlife habitat, watersheds, and other important natural and scenic features of the Santa Cruz Mountains and encourages public appreciation and enjoyment of this environment. [sempervirens.org](http://sempervirens.org)

### About Save the Redwoods League

One of the nation's longest-running conservation organizations, Save the Redwoods League has been protecting and restoring redwood forests since 1918. The League has connected generations of visitors with the beauty and serenity of the redwood forest. The nonprofit's 29,000 supporters have enabled the organization to protect more than 216,000 acres of irreplaceable forest in 66 state, national and local parks and reserves. For information, please visit [SaveTheRedwoods.org](http://SaveTheRedwoods.org).

### About Land Trust of Santa Cruz County

The mission of the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County is to protect, care for, and connect people to the extraordinary lands that make this area special. Information is available at [LandTrustSantaCruz.org](http://LandTrustSantaCruz.org)

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