

## **A statement from Steve Mietz, president and CEO of Save the Redwoods League, about the impacts of the government shutdown on public lands and park staff**

We are now enduring the longest federal government shutdown in U.S. history. This shutdown has ripple effects for all who care about public lands, regardless of our politics. It is not good for our parks and reserves, the people who manage them, or the people who visit them.

As president of Save the Redwoods League and former superintendent of Redwood National and State Parks during the 2018 government shutdown, I've seen firsthand how a shutdown harms the public lands containing our remaining coast redwood and giant sequoia forests. On the heels of the federal staffing purges carried out earlier this year, the shutdown's negative impacts on parks are severe, with our national parks and land management partners reporting numerous hardships.

### **Impacts on the forests**

When park interpretive rangers and natural and cultural resource staff are furloughed, redwood forests suffer. The impacts are fewer in the short term, but as a shutdown drags on, it creates a shortage of rangers, leading to damaged parks and compromised safety for the visitors in most need of guidance. Inevitably, bad actors may take advantage of staffing shortages to engage in prohibited activities within national parks. We saw this during the 2018 government shutdown in Joshua Tree National Park, which was kept open with significantly reduced staff. Some visitors cut down Joshua trees, damaged trails, vandalized rocks with graffiti, and drove off-road through sensitive areas. This degradation occurred over the span of 34 days, and it could be several hundred years before the park recovers from these scars.

Another threat is burl poaching, when thieves use chainsaws to cut natural burl formations out of ancient redwoods to be sold for use in sculptures or furniture. This causes visceral damage to the trees and can even kill them—a tragedy only kept in check when parks are fully staffed. Negative impacts from other unauthorized activities like illegal camping, vandalism, and off-trail hiking all increase when park staff are not around.

### **Impacts on people**

During a federal shutdown, many park employees are furloughed without pay. These workers have now missed two pay periods and are due to miss another, creating real hardship, especially for families with a mortgage or rent and children to feed. The financial strain reaches beyond the parks to local recreation economies that rely on a steady stream of visitors: hotels, cafes and restaurants, outdoor retail shops, and more. All these businesses are losing critical revenue that will not be reimbursed by the government when the shutdown ends.

### **What can we do to help?**

Our national parks, forests, and those who care for them need all of us to raise our voices on their behalf during this uncertain time. There are several ways you can take action to support them:

1. Contact your local Congressional representative and express your concern for the parks, public lands, and people who are impacted, urging them to resolve the issues that led to the shutdown. ([House](#) list; [Senate](#) list)
2. Support local food banks that serve redwood communities, where furloughed park staff may need assistance for their families:
  - a. [Food for People](#) (Humboldt County)
  - b. [Redwood Empire Food Bank](#) (Sonoma, Lake, Mendocino, Humboldt, and Del Norte counties)
  - c. [Food Link](#) (Tulare County)
  - d. [ATCAA](#) (Tuolumne County)
  - e. [Merced and Mariposa County Food Bank](#)
3. Respect park rules and closures (check [here](#) for updates), stay on trails, leave nothing but footprints and take only pictures.

To those public servants who have pledged their time and careers to protecting our public lands for current and future generations, this is about more than a paycheck. It is a calling. For the past 37 days, they have endured the loss of financial security and their purpose as stewards of our national parks.

Public agencies need sustained and stable funding to protect our public lands and support those who take care of them. Right now, people and nature are being neglected, but like the redwoods themselves, our parks and their staff are resilient—we can come back from this. Save the Redwoods League calls on all Americans to stand in solidarity with our park partners to help them weather current political tides.