

Shady Dell deal preserves majestic redwood forest

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Fort Bragg --

- On a steep hillside along the spectacularly rugged Mendocino County coast, is an 11-acre grove of ancient redwood trees with twisted trunks and branches that shoot out wildly in all directions as if frozen in the middle of a convulsion fit.

The contorted trees, most of which are 500 years old, survived only because their bent wood could not be turned into lumber, and they are a biological gold mine to conservationists.

The grove of "candelabra" redwoods, known as the Enchanted Forest, is one of the primary reasons San Francisco's Save the Redwoods League purchased the spectacular 957-acre piece of coastline known as Shady Dell, where the gnarled old trees live.

"This is an example of redwoods responding to the environment - the coastal wind," Emily Limm, the league's director of science, said as she stood under a huge branch jutting sideways out from the trunk. "The tops of these trees get broken off by the wind, so they regrow near the trunk."

complex transaction

The acquisition, completed Oct. 27 and announced today, is part of a complex transaction designed to preserve 50,635 acres of redwood forest in a remote coastal area north of Fort Bragg where environmental activists and loggers once battled over the fate of California's stands of timber.

It will extend by a mile the rugged Lost Coast, the longest roadless stretch of land in the 48 contiguous states.

The nonprofit Redwood Forest Foundation sold Shady Dell outright to the Redwoods League for \$5.5 million. The Conservation Fund, a national nonprofit, then purchased a \$20 million conservation easement preventing development in the 49,678-acre Usal Redwood Forest, which the Forest Foundation still owns.

The \$25.5 million deal will preserve the entire forest in perpetuity and allow the foundation to start paying back the \$65 million loan it used to purchase the land.

Although logging will be banned in Shady Dell, the easement will allow a limited harvest in the Usal. Timber sales will help the foundation pay for interpretive programs and environmental improvements and assist local communities and American Indian tribes.

"We aspire to a closer relationship between jobs in the woods and people who live in communities around these forests," said foundation President Kathy Moxon. "We should be able to take wood in a way that keeps the forest healthy."

The deal links the Usal forest and Shady Dell with the 7,800-acre Sinkyone Wilderness State Park, Sinkyone Intertribal Wilderness Council land, and 60,000-acre King Range National Conservation Area.

"It's the largest working forest conservation easement in California," said Chris Kelly, the Conservation Fund's California program director. "Almost 100,000 acres of productive forestland is now owned and operated by nonprofits. This is an evolution in thinking of how forest conservation can work."

logging history

The Usal is a particularly important piece of property for anyone who cares about redwoods. The region was covered by old-growth trees until the 1850s when white men first began showing up. By 1900, 400

people lived in a logging town on Usal Beach. North Coast redwood trees were used to rebuild San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake and fire.

Ruskin Hartley, the executive director of Save the Redwoods, said a visit to the region inspired the creation of Save the Redwoods League in 1918. "What they saw was a trail of fallen giants," Hartley said.

The clear-cutting began in earnest after World War II, when mechanized equipment was brought in, according to Art Harwood, a former logging company owner in the area. It was so bad, he said, that environmental activists began streaming into the area in the 1960s. By the mid-1980s, logging roads were being blocked, activists were sitting in trees and Dr. Seuss' anti-logging screed "The Lorax" was required reading in local schools.

"All you have to do is look at what the big lumber companies were doing then, and you realize that these people were right," Harwood said. He helped found the Redwood Forest Foundation 14 years ago with the goal of combining conservation with sustainable logging. In 2007, the foundation bought the Usal Forest from the Hawthorne Timber Co.

Save the Redwoods still needs to raise \$1 million by Dec. 31 to complete the deal.

The conservation easement limits logging to no more than 2.9 percent of the standing timber each year, an amount that will allow more trees to grow larger over time, said Harwood, the foundation's former executive director. In the meantime, he said, forest habitat will be restored for 250 wildlife species, including osprey and northern spotted owl.

Conditions for coho salmon, chinook and steelhead trout also will be improved in Usal Creek and on the south fork of the Eel River, he said. The foundation intends to sell carbon credits and set up an experimental bio-char site, a clean-burning contraption that turns excess forest brush into nutrient-rich soil additives.

pristine natural wonders

Only Shady Dell includes a beach, but there is no question that the wind-twisted trees of the Enchanted Forest are the most spectacular and pristine natural wonders in the newly formed preserve. The thick, sprawling branches create habitat for bats, mammals such as red tree voles, spotted owls and a wide variety of birds. This kind of redwood habitat, which normally occurs 200 feet high, happens close to the ground in these particular trees, a situation that naturalists predict will be a scientific bonanza.

"I have never seen another stand of redwoods like this," said Christine Ambrose, land project manager for Save the Redwoods. "I think it is safe to say that this stand is unique to redwoods and hence unique in the world."

shady dell

Information on the property: savetheredwoods.org

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<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2011/11/04/MNBF1LQ6TK.DTL>

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