

WEST COAST VIEW/NAVION RALLY • KLAMATH, CALIFORNIA

Redwoods & Rivers

*Local History, Redwood National Park & Forest Ecology
Along the Klamath River*

September 2026



PROGRAM

Three Stops Along One Story

About 30 minutes, three parts — the people and events that shaped this ground, the park we're camped inside of, and the trees themselves.



PART ONE

Local History

Yurok homeland, the Gold Rush, the timber era, the flood that moved a town, and the fight to free a river.



PART TWO

Redwood National Park

How the park came together, what's record-setting inside it, and what to go see this week.



PART THREE

Redwood Ecology

How a tree gets to be 350 feet tall and 2,000 years old — and who else lives in it.



SETTING THE SCENE

Where We Are

Klamath sits **right at the mouth of the Klamath River**, in Del Norte County — the last few miles of a river that begins in the high desert of southern Oregon and ends in the Pacific. The community is completely surrounded by Redwood National and State Parks, which makes it about as good a base camp for this topic as exists anywhere.

Del Norte County

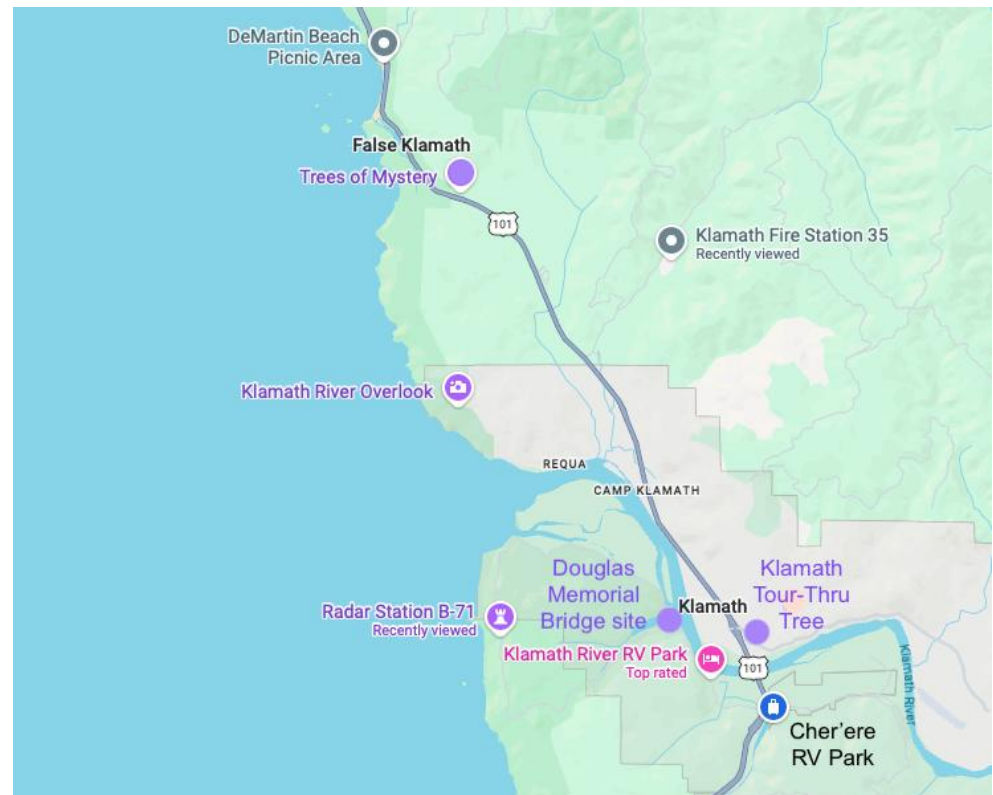
Northwesternmost county in California

US 101

The Redwood Highway runs straight through town

Landmarks worth a look this week:

- Trees of Mystery — SkyTrail, gondola ride above the canopy, and Redwood Canopy Trail. open since 1946
- Klamath Tour-Thru Tree — one of the last true drive-through redwoods
- Douglas Memorial Bridge site — its bronze bears outlasted the 1964 flood

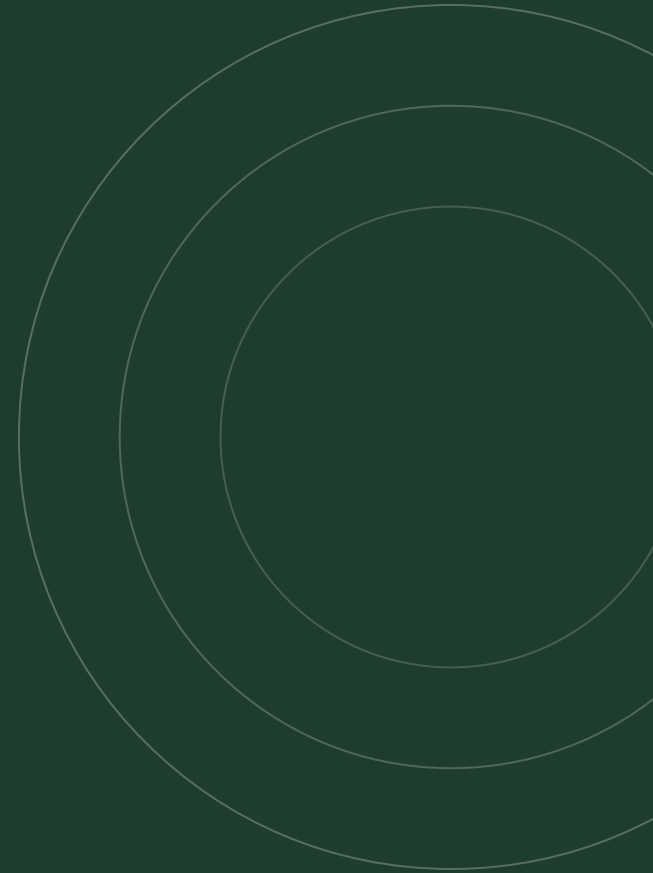




PART ONE

Local History

10,000 years of people on this river, in about eight minutes.





LOCAL HISTORY

The Yurok Homeland

The Yurok have lived along the lower Klamath River for roughly **10,000 years**, with some village sites dating to the 1300s. Today the Yurok Tribe is California's largest, with about **6,000 enrolled members**.

The Yurok call themselves Oohl — simply, “the people.” Whites were essentially unknown to them before 1850.



~70

known villages along the Klamath and coast

10,000 yrs

continuous presence on the lower river

6,000+

enrolled members today — California's largest tribe

Cher'ere Campground and RV Park is owned by **Pulikla Tribe of Yurok People**. The Pulikla Tribe is completely enclosed within the Yurok Reservation of the Yurok Tribe. Tribal member population of 39 persons was reported during the 2020 census.



LOCAL HISTORY

Salmon, Redwood, and Ceremony



A Salmon Economy

The Klamath was once the third-largest salmon-producing river on the West Coast. Fish were caught, traded, and preserved to sustain a highly structured social and ceremonial calendar.



Homes Built From Redwood

Plank houses, sweathouses, and canoes were built from fallen redwood logs — the Yurok never needed to fell a living tree, which they regarded as a sacred, living guardian.



World Renewal Ceremonies

Dances such as the White Deerskin and Jump Dance are still held today, performed to keep the world in balance — traditions that survived a century of suppression.





1850: Everything Changes

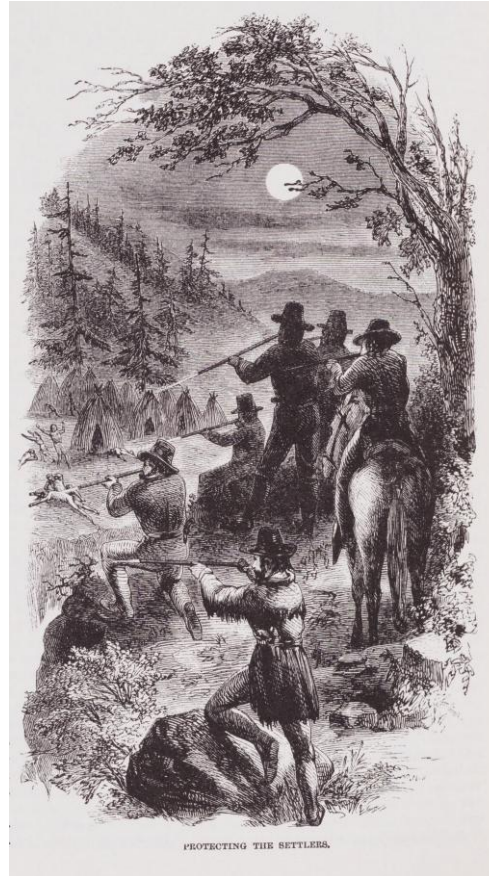
Contact with Euro-Americans was minimal until the 1850 Gold Rush brought a sudden flood of miners, trappers, and settlers into Yurok territory.

75%

Roughly three-quarters of the Yurok population died in the decades following contact, by the tribe's own account.

Disease & Conflict

Introduced disease and violent conflict, including the Klamath and Salmon River War, took a devastating toll on Native communities across the basin.



Satirical illustration titled "Protecting The Settlers" by J. R. Browne in *The Indians Of California*, 1864

1855: Reservation

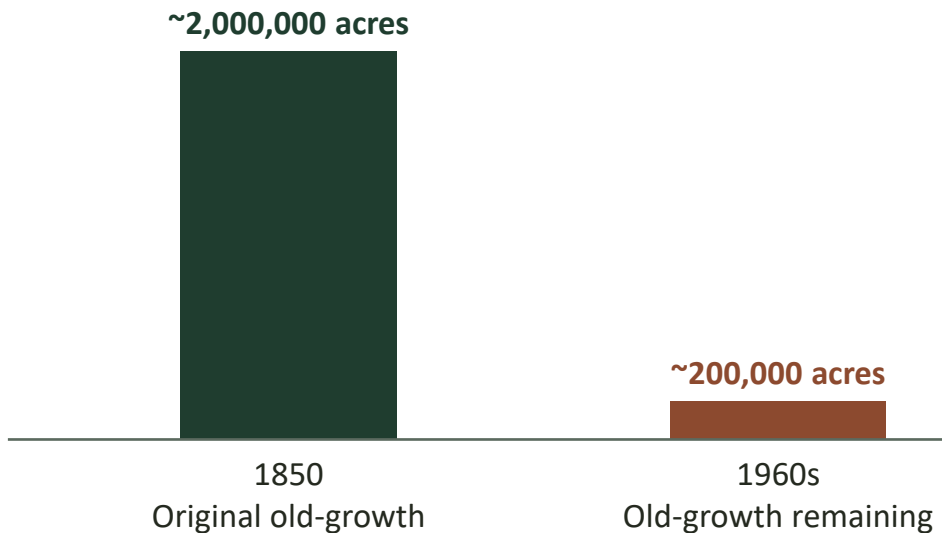
The Lower Klamath River Indian Reservation was established by executive order, formally confining Yurok people to a fraction of their homeland.



LOCAL HISTORY

The Timber Era

Redwood harvesting began in earnest in the early 1850s. Of an original **two million acres** of old-growth redwood forest, demand for durable, rot-resistant lumber — then World War II and the postwar housing boom — drove relentless cutting. By the 1960s, roughly **90% of the old growth was gone**.





LOCAL HISTORY

The Great Flood of 1964

Starting December 21, 1964, storms dumped roughly two feet of warm rain onto a heavy mountain snowpack. The Klamath and Eel rivers surged, and the flood — the worst in the region's recorded history — destroyed **98% of the town of Klamath**. The community was rebuilt from scratch on higher ground.

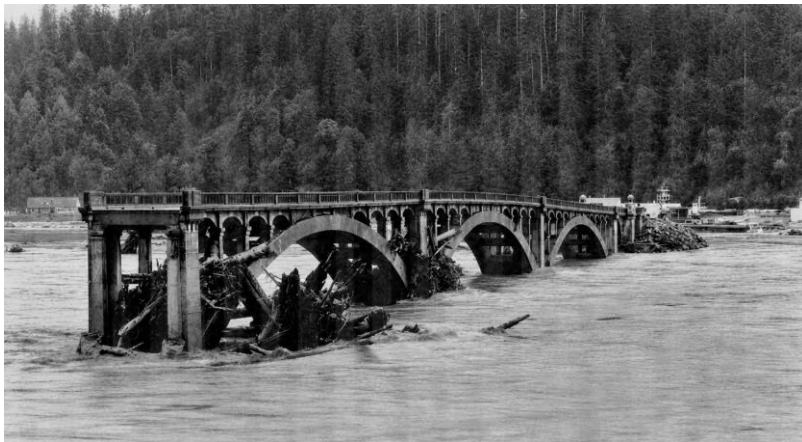
The 1926 Douglas Memorial Bridge was swept away — but its two eight-ton bronze bear statues survived and still stand at the old bridge site, a favorite stop on the coast highway.

98%

of the town of Klamath destroyed

~3 weeks

of flooding, late Dec. 1964 – mid-Jan. 1965





LOCAL HISTORY — RECENT

Freeing the River

Starting in 1918, four hydroelectric dams blocked salmon migration on the upper Klamath. After decades of Tribally-led advocacy, all four — **Iron Gate, Copco No. 1, Copco No. 2, and J.C. Boyle** — came down between 2023 and August 2024: the **largest dam removal project in U.S. history**.

420 mi

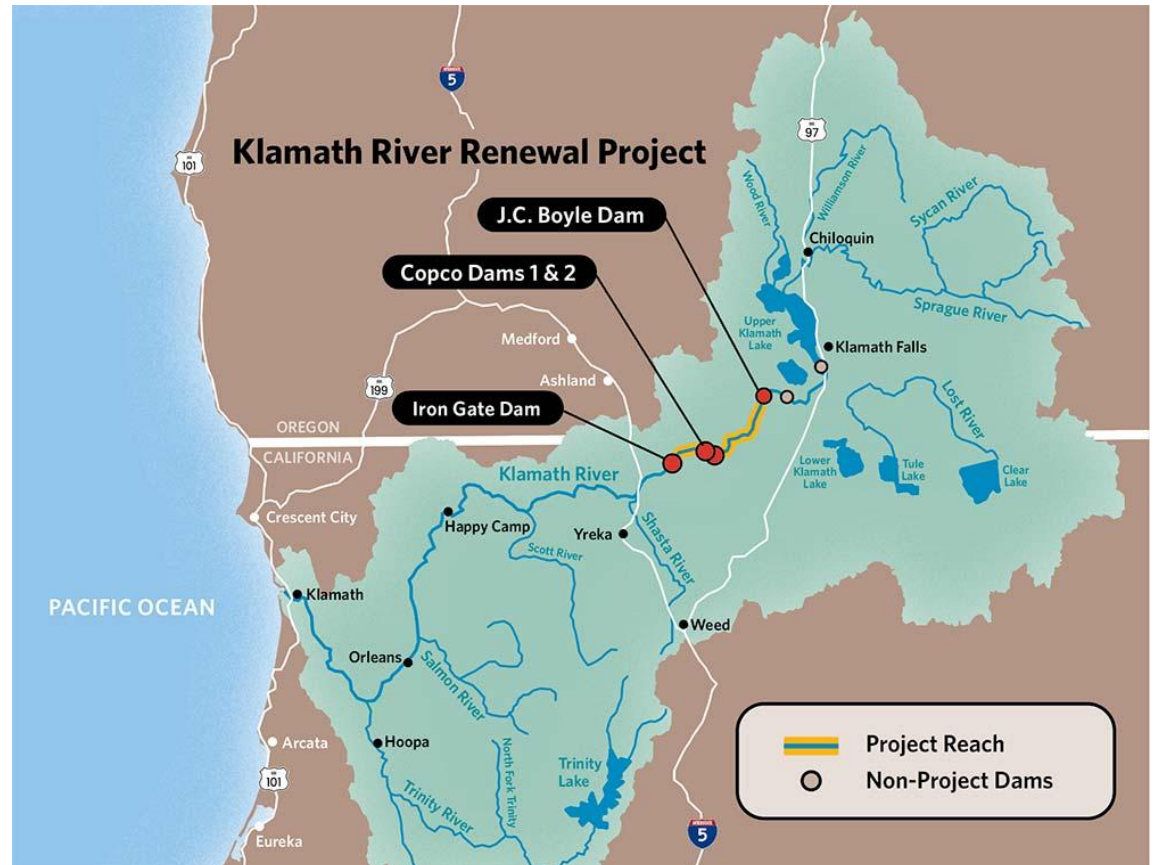
of river and tributary
habitat reopened to fish

4

dams removed, 2023–2024

Oct. 2024

first Chinook salmon
recorded above the former
dam sites

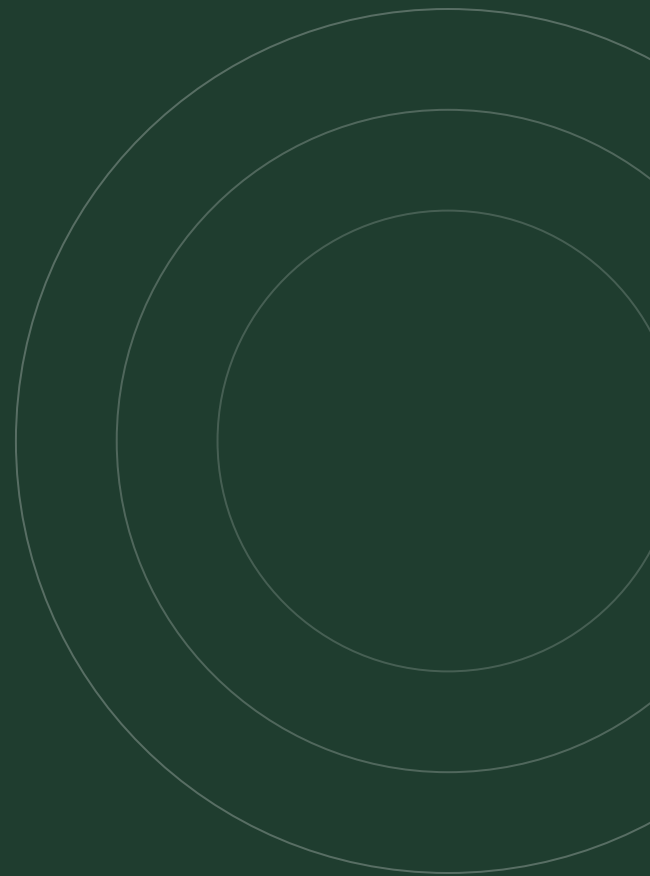




PART TWO

Redwood National & State Parks

Where the campground trail meets the tallest trees on Earth.





THE PARK TODAY

Redwood National & State Parks, At a Glance



139,091

acres — combined federal
and state land



1968

national park established;
expanded in 1978



1980

designated a UNESCO
World Heritage Site



1994

NPS and CA State Parks
began joint management



3

state parks folded in:
Prairie Creek, Del Norte
Coast, Jedediah Smith



~450K

visitors a year come to walk
among the giants



Saving the Giants

In 1918, conservationists — including figures connected to the founding of the National Park Service — formed the **Save the Redwoods League**, raising private money to buy old-growth groves outright, often as living memorials, matched by state funds.

1923

Prairie Creek Redwoods State Park

1925

Del Norte Coast Redwoods State Park

1929

Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park





LOCAL HISTORY

A National Park Is Born

- 1968** President Johnson signs Redwood National Park into law on October 2 — after nearly 60 years of advocacy.
- 1969** The Lady Bird Johnson Grove is dedicated, named for the First Lady who championed the park.
- 1978** Congress expands the park's boundaries, adding cutover land for restoration and buffering old growth.
- 1980** UNESCO designates Redwood National and State Parks a World Heritage Site.
- 1994** NPS and California State Parks combine the national park with three state parks into one jointly managed unit.

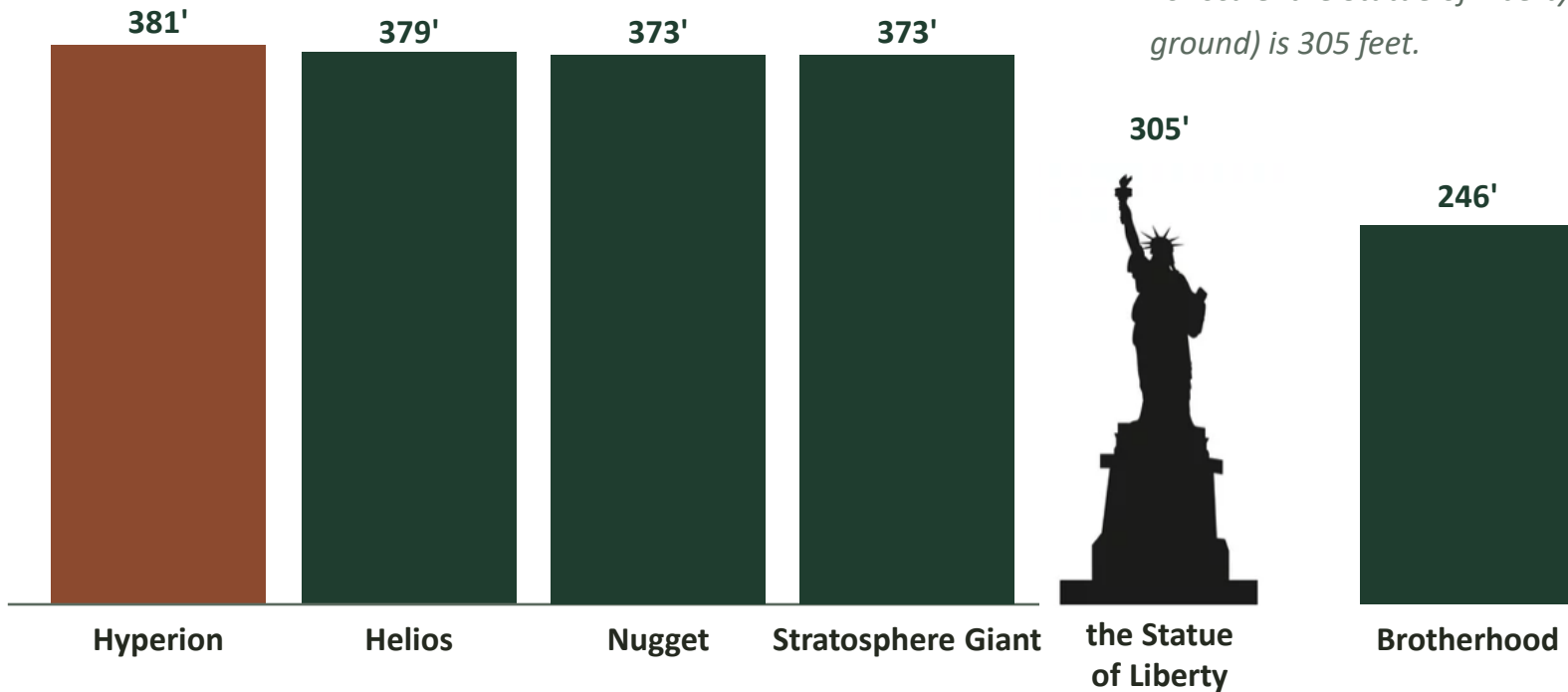
Together these four parks protect 45% of remaining old-growth coast redwoods in combined 139,000 acres of federal and state land.



RECORD TREES

Giants Among Giants

The tallest trees ever measured all grow in this park system. Exact locations of the record holders are kept off maps to protect their shallow root systems from foot traffic. Individuals who enter the closed area could face up to six months in jail and a \$5,000 maximum fine.



*The tallest tree in
Trees of Mystery*



THIS WEEK

Things to See & Do



Newton B. Drury Parkway

Old highway through Prairie Creek Redwoods — the classic scenic drive.



Karl Knapp – Foothill Trail Loop

Easy 2.5-mile loop including the Big Tree viewing area



Trees of Mystery – SkyTrail and Redwood Canopy Trail

Gondola ride and aerial netted suspension bridges.



Coastal Drive

Bluff-top gravel road with Pacific overlooks and old WWII radar station remnants.



Fern Canyon

50-foot fern-draped walls; short walk, unforgettable payoff. -
Reservation required from May 15th to September 15th



Tall Trees Grove

Permit-required trailhead access to some of the tallest trees on Earth.



WILDLIFE VIEWING

The Comeback of the Roosevelt Elk

Millions of Roosevelt elk once ranged from San Francisco Bay to British Columbia. Overhunting nearly wiped them out — By the early 1900s, only a few hundred Roosevelt elk managed to survive in dense, remote forests.

Habitat protection turned that around. Today more than **5,000 elk** live in California, and Prairie Creek's Elk Meadow is one of the most reliable wildlife-viewing spots on the entire coast — early morning and dusk are best.

Millions

→ A few hundred

→ 5,000+

Roosevelt elk in California, early 1900 vs. today

Give them room

Bull elk can be unpredictable, especially in fall rut.
Stay well back and never approach for a photo.

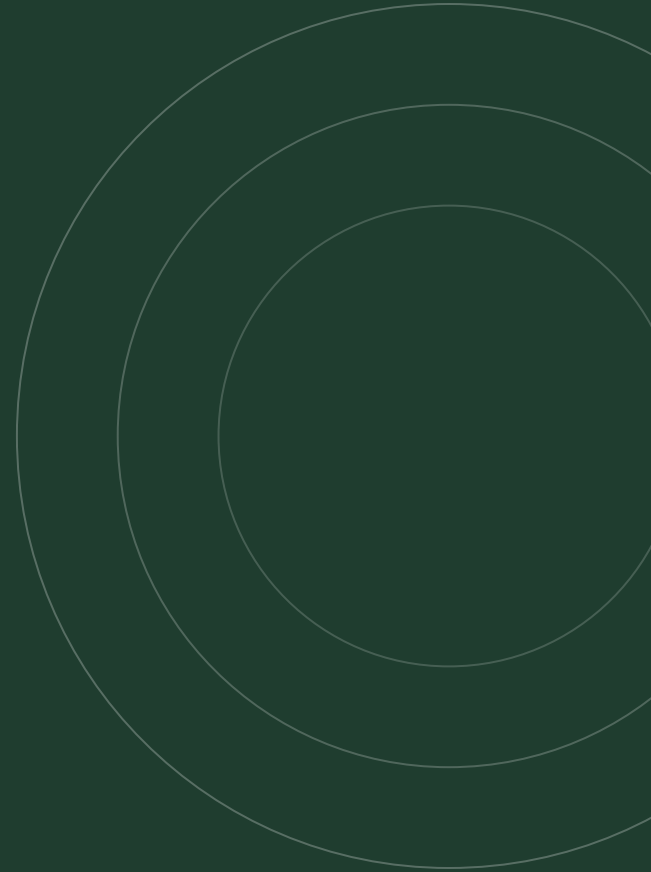




PART THREE

Redwood Ecology

How a tree gets to be 350 feet tall and 2,000 years old.





MEET THE TREE

An Ancient Lineage

The coast redwood's ancient relatives go back to the age of dinosaurs — roughly **160 million years** — and once grew across much of the Northern Hemisphere, before an ice age and drying climate confined it to this narrow fog belt.

400–500 yrs

to reach full maturity

2,000+ yrs

documented lifespan for some living trees

30 mi

the species' entire range never strays farther from the coast



HOW THEY GROW

Built to Reach the Sky



Drinking the Fog

Redwood range tracks summer fog more closely than rainfall. Fog condenses on the crown and drips to the roots — and needles can absorb moisture directly, supplementing water pulled up from the ground.



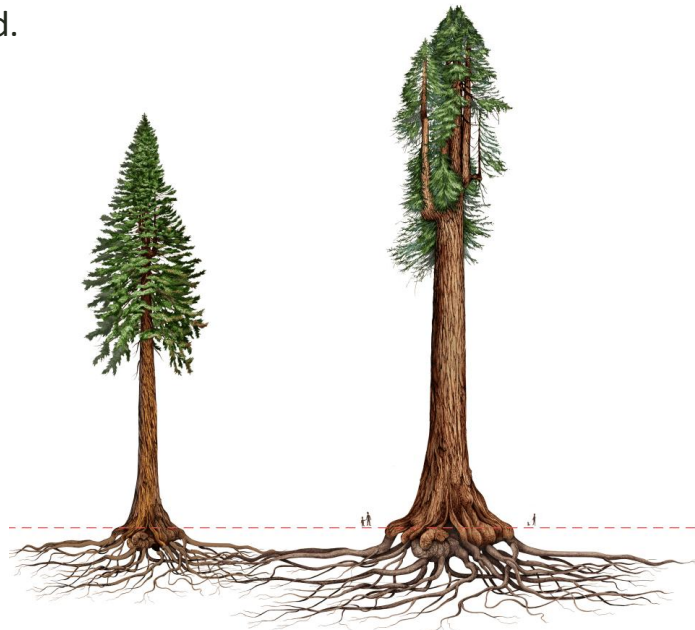
500 Gallons a Day

A large redwood can transpire up to 500 gallons of water daily — enough that a grove effectively generates its own fog and microclimate.



No Taproot, Wide Reach

Roots run only 10–13 feet deep but spread 60–80 feet sideways, interlocking with neighboring trees' roots for mutual support against wind.





BUILT TO LAST

Fire- and Rot-Proof

Redwoods carry a suite of defenses that let individual trees survive for millennia — even through repeated wildfire.



A Foot of Bark

Fibrous bark up to 12 inches thick insulates the living tissue from heat, and the tree carries almost no flammable pitch or resin.



Tannins

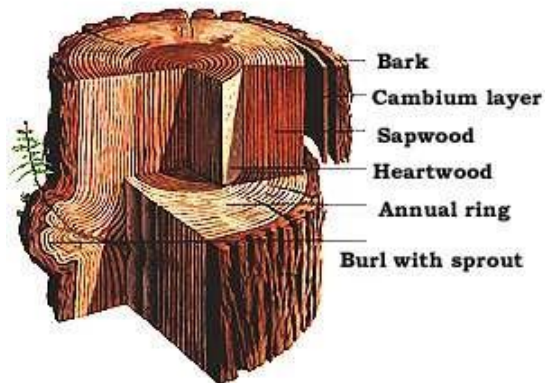
Bitter tannin compounds — the source of the wood's red color — resist insects, fungus, and fire, and don't burn easily themselves.



Goosepens

Fire can hollow a cave-like chamber into a living tree without killing it; owls and bats often roost inside.

The Redwood Tree





TWO ECOSYSTEMS, ONE TREE

Two ways to reproduce



Seeds

Coast redwood produces very small seeds—about 100,000 seeds per pound. Mature cones can release seeds naturally, and heat/drying associated with fire can help release additional seeds.

A low-intensity fire can reset the forest floor, giving redwood seeds a chance to start over



Reiteration

Redwoods sprout new trunks from their own limbs, sometimes over a hundred per tree, essentially building a forest out of one tree.

New redwoods also sprout directly from a parent tree's roots — a head start that lets seedlings grow over a foot a year.





WHO LIVES HERE

Wildlife of the Redwoods



Marbled Murrelet

A seabird that fishes the ocean by day and flies up to 50 miles inland to nest on mossy old-growth branches — its treetop nesting wasn't even confirmed until 1974. Numbers have fallen from about 60,000 to under 6,000 along the California coast.



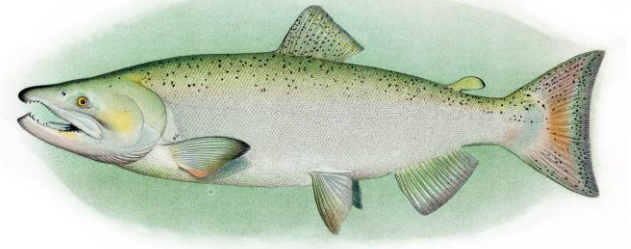
Northern Spotted Owl

One of two federally threatened birds that depend on the shady, moist old-growth canopy — alongside the murrelet, a benchmark species for forest health.



Salmon & Steelhead

The rivers threading these forests support runs of Chinook and coho salmon and steelhead trout — now recovering as the Klamath's dams come out.



400+ bird species and mammals from Roosevelt elk to black bear and mountain lion round out the picture.



LOOKING AHEAD

What's Left, What's Next

<5%

of the original two million acres of old-growth coast redwood remain uncut today — most of it now protected inside parks like this one.



Second-Growth Restoration

The parks actively thin dense second-growth stands and reintroduce controlled burns, working to return the forest toward its pre-1850 condition.



Ongoing Acquisition

Save the Redwoods League continues buying and restoring cutover land to expand protected old growth and connect fragmented groves.



A River Reconnected

With the Klamath's dams gone, forest and river conservation are, for the first time in a century, moving forward together.



One River, One Forest, One Long Story

The Yurok who built canoes from fallen redwoods, the loggers who nearly emptied this coast, the families who rebuilt Klamath after 1964, and the tribes who just freed the river again — they're all part of why these trees are still standing over our campsite tonight.

Thank you — questions welcome

Enjoy the rally, and enjoy the trees.