

NORTH COAST CITIZENS AND CONSERVATION GROUPS FILE SUIT TO PROTECT ANCIENT REDWOODS FROM CALTRANS HIGHWAY PROJECT

SAN FRANCISCO — A coalition of local citizens and conservation organizations filed suit today in San Francisco Superior Court to protect the ancient redwoods of Richardson Grove State Park in Northern California. The lawsuit challenges Caltrans' approval of a controversial highway widening and realignment project. According to the lawsuit, Caltrans violated the California Environmental Quality Act in approving the project, which poses unacceptable risks to Richardson Grove State Park, its ancient redwoods, endangered species, and the rural region behind the fabled "redwood curtain." The project involves cutting down numerous trees and threatens the survival of almost one hundred more.

"Caltrans has not shown that this project will not harm our priceless park. We cannot risk damaging the old growth redwoods which Richardson Grove State Park was created to protect," said Kerul Dyer, Richardson Grove campaign coordinator for the Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC). "The project is dangerous to the grove and isn't necessary to address any known safety issue."

"Caltrans wants to cut through and pave over the life-giving roots of ancient redwoods in one of California's most-loved state parks, yet expects us to believe there won't be any damage," said Peter Galvin, conservation director for the Center for Biological Diversity. "Caltrans' failure to follow the law puts these old-growth trees and the endangered species dependent on them at unacceptable risk."

The Environmental Impact Report prepared by Caltrans failed to acknowledge the full extent of the project's impacts, as required by state law, including the effects of cutting through and paving over the widespread but shallow network of roots holding Richardson Grove together, the consequences of stockpiling lead-contaminated soil in an area draining to the wild and scenic South Fork Eel River, and the far-reaching impacts of opening the road to larger trucks. Caltrans also failed to adopt legally required measures to lessen these impacts and failed to consider less damaging alternatives.

Joining EPIC and the Center for Biological Diversity as plaintiffs in the lawsuit are Trisha Lotus, Jeffery Hedin, Bruce Edwards, Loreen Eliason, and Californians for Alternatives to Toxics. Trisha Lotus is the great granddaughter of Henry Devoy, who in 1922 transferred to California the initial redwood forest which became Richardson Grove State Park. Jeffrey Hedin is a disabled Vietnam War Veteran, an elected commissioner with the Piercy Fire Protection District, and a volunteer responder to emergencies in Mendocino and Humboldt counties. Bruce Edwards is licensed contractor who frequently travels the highway through Richardson Grove in both directions on a daily basis for his work. Loreen Eliason is a Humboldt County native and the proprietor of Riverwood Inn. Built in 1937 and located at the beginning of the Avenue of the Giants, the Riverwood Inn is the last original "roadhouse" on Highway 101 in Humboldt County.

The lawsuit was prepared and filed with the *pro bono* assistance of Philip Gregory, former Congressman Pete McCloskey and Stuart Gross, attorneys from the renowned litigation firm of Cotchett, Pitre & McCarthy. The firm's high-caliber lawyering and dedication to socially just causes have won it statewide and national recognition. Sharon Duggan, an expert on environmental law with an emphasis on forestry regulation joined with Cotchett, Pitre & McCarthy in the preparation of the lawsuit.

According to former Congressman McCloskey, "This case is about Caltrans ignoring the science, the historic and economic value Richardson Grove, and the will of Californians. All of these factors weigh heavily in favor of protecting these ancient and iconic redwoods from a project that Caltrans admits will have no impact on safety. These patriotic individuals and organizations have stood up against Caltrans and in favor of common sense. Cotchett, Pitre & McCarthy is honored to represent them in this fight."

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