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CONSERVATION FUND

North Coast Forest
Conservation Initiative

2020 Annual Review

	2018	2019	2020
Water Quality			
Big River Forest lowest summer stream temperature (mean weekly average temperature)	57 (Lower Two Log Creek)	59 (Lower Two Log Creek)	59 (Lower Two Log Creek)
Big River Forest highest summer stream temperature (mean weekly average temperature)	70 (Mainstream Big River at eastern property line)	69 (Mainstream Big River at eastern property line)	69 (Mainstream Big River at eastern property line)
Environmental Monitoring & Assessment Program reaches monitored per year on the Garcia River by The Nature Conservancy and the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (65 total reaches established)	4	5	0
Forest Economics			
Estimated local economic contribution (employment, contractors, purchases)	\$3.2 million	\$3.5 million	\$3.5 million
Volume of logs removed (gross board feet)	2,698,450	2,947,360	3,758,790
Number of log truckloads to mill	654	618	620
Verified forest carbon offsets	379,774	327,988	Verification in progress
Miles driven by an average passenger car* that are equal to above forest carbon offsets	942,367,246	824,298,743	Verification in progress
Community Outreach			
Number of participants in the Pedestrian and Equestrian Stewardship Access Program on Salmon Creek, Big River	10	10	10
Public tours	6	6	0 (postponed due to COVID-19)
Northern Spotted Owl Conservation			
Northern spotted owl activity centers	28	28	29
Northern spotted owls successfully fledged	1 - Garcia 2 - Big River	1 - Garcia 1 - Big River	1 - Garcia
Forest acres set aside for northern spotted owl habitat	2,800	2,800	2,900
Coho Salmon and Steelhead Trout Conservation			
Approximate cubic yards of sediment saved through road improvement projects	22,394	1,082	6,072
California Department of Fish and Wildlife salmonid spawner survey reaches sampled	5	6	6
Numbers of logs added to streams to improve salmonid habitat	31 - Rockpile Creek 127 - Signal Creek 78 - Olsen Gulch	0**	0**

*The EPA's Greenhouse Gas Equivalencies Calculator, used to convert the verified metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent to number of miles driven by an average car, can be found at www.epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator.

**We have received grant funding for future projects.



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Project Background

At The Conservation Fund, we know that well-managed forests can be both economically viable and ecologically sustainable. On California's North Coast, we continue to refine and demonstrate our pioneering approach to forest conservation: balancing environmental restoration and stewardship with the economic imperatives of large-scale forest ownership and the desire to sustain the local timber economy.

Since 2004, with the help of our public and private partners, we have protected more than 120,000 acres of forestland as part of our North Coast Forest Conservation Initiative. Of these protected forests, we own and manage more than 74,000 acres in Mendocino and Sonoma counties. Our goal is to prove that large, understocked tracts of coastal forest can be returned to

ecological and economic viability through patient, adaptive management by a nonprofit organization, in partnership with private and public entities and community stakeholders.

We invite you to learn more about the accomplishments, challenges and activities of our program in 2020. Our success depends on the strong support of a diverse set of partners—donors, neighbors, local businesses, government agencies and conservation groups. None of this would be possible without you. Thank you for your interest and continued support.

Also, thank you to our staff, contractors and neighbors who helped us minimize COVID-19 risk over the course of 2020, especially during fire season.

Habitat Restoration

Placing large wood in streams and upgrading our 500-plus miles of road infrastructure to reduce the sediment that ends up in streams is a high priority for salmon habitat restoration. Maintaining roads is also critical for traveling through the forests for log hauling, stream restoration projects, botanical surveys and northern spotted owl surveys. A significant portion of the money we make through timber and carbon sales is reinvested in improving forest legacy roads, many of which predate modern standards.

One example of these important road improvement projects is the Inman Creek Sediment Reduction Project, which was completed in 2020 and funded in part by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Fisheries Restoration Grant Program. Erosion control and prevention work—stormproofing—applied on a watershed scale is the first and perhaps most important step when restoring watersheds and their anadromous fish populations where sediment is a limiting factor to fisheries production. Unlike many watershed improvement activities, stormproofing has an immediate and long-term benefit to the streams and aquatic habitat within the watershed. The Inman Creek project reduced approximately 2,000 cubic yards of future sediment delivery through the abandonment and stabilization of watercourse crossings along 1.6 miles of near-stream roads.



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In 2020, we also continued the Stewart Creek Sediment Reduction Project in the Gualala River Forest, in partnership with Pacific Watershed Associates and the Mendocino County Resource Conservation District, using cost-share funding from the State Water Resources Control Board. We completed Phase I of the project in 2019, stormproofing 6.5 miles of road, which will prevent 7,480 cubic yards of sediment from entering Gualala River tributaries—the equivalent of 780 dump trucks of dirt! Phase II of the project is underway with road drainage treatments on nearly 5 miles of road, with 3,790 cubic yards of sediment savings.

In addition, through the timber harvest plan process, we upgraded 6.8 miles of road in Big River Forest, preventing 1,082 cubic yards of sediment from entering waterways.

Timber Harvests

The total volume of sustainably harvested trees in 2020 was 3,758,790 gross board feet from Big River, Gualala River and Garcia River forests. This is slightly below our Allowable Annual Cut—the amount of timber that can be harvested each year on a sustainable basis within a defined forest area—as determined in our management plans and Option A Sustained Yield Plan. Local logging companies harvested the redwood and Douglas fir logs and sold them to sawmills in Mendocino and Sonoma counties. Our forest conservation would not be possible without a healthy forest industry; we thank the local sawmills, logging contractors and resource professionals who help make our program, and the forests, successful.



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Public Access Program

The Conservation Fund provides pedestrian and bicycle access in the Big River and Salmon Creek forests, and equestrian access in the Salmon Creek Forest. These programs were launched in 2007 to provide outdoor recreation, cultivate stewardship and increase surveillance on the forests. Participants sign a permit to hike or ride for free on logging roads in the forests. In Big River, we provide access to local community members to harvest firewood for people's homes. Since 2012 we have allowed limited permit-based hunting in the Garcia River Forest to local residents. In addition, multiple tours of all forests to review harvests and restoration projects are offered throughout the year. We now are evaluating the potential for providing expanded public access to Buckeye Forest. Please contact hnewberger@conservationfund.org to sign up for any of these public access opportunities.



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Climate Action

Forest conservation is critical in the fight against climate change, and redwood forests store more carbon per acre than any other forest type. Before we purchased the North Coast forests, they were at risk of conversion or continued overharvesting. Our goal has always been to sustainably manage and restore the forests. The emergence of a market for carbon credits stimulated by California's 2006 Global Warming Solutions Act allowed us to purchase additional land, reduce harvest levels and accelerate the pace of watershed restoration. Our North Coast forest carbon projects comply with protocols approved and administered by the California Air Resources Board (CARB) and are certified through CARB-approved third-party verifiers to ensure that the carbon offsets are real, verifiable, additional, enforceable and permanent.



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Forest Certification

As they have every fall since 2007, third-party verifiers completed a field audit of the North Coast Forest Conservation Initiative to the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®-C001535) and Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) standards. This project, and our other working forests throughout the country, were in overall conformance with the standards in 2020, receiving no corrective action requests. These are two of the most strict and comprehensive standards for forest management. We actively participate in the California SFI Implementation Committee and welcome comments and questions regarding our forest certification. Full audit reports are available on our website: www.conservationfund.org/projects/north-coast-forest-conservation-initiative/north-coast-reference-documents.



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Spotlight

Whitney Watson, a graduate research assistant in the forest and wildlife ecology department at the University of Wisconsin, has been conducting barred owl research on the Big River Forest. The range expansion of the barred owl into western North America over the past century has emerged as a major threat to the endangered northern spotted owl and to the overall health of western forest ecosystems.

A better understanding of the current distribution of barred owls is critical to effective management of this species.

Whitney's research in California's Coastal Redwood region will characterize distribution patterns of juvenile barred owls. She will attach satellite GPS tags to barred owls to assess the timing and distance of dispersal, habitat selection during dispersal, and survival rate and mortality factors of dispersal in juvenile barred owls. The tags allow for fully remote tracking of the owls and have the potential to provide owl locations up to 18 months, making this study the first of its kind. Another aim of her research is to establish a baseline for current barred owl distribution in the Coastal Redwood region and to develop cost-effective and scalable means for monitoring barred owl populations across the landscape. She is integrating bioacoustic



data collected using autonomous recording units and GPS data from tagged adult barred owls to examine the potential of bioacoustic monitoring to measure barred owl occupancy and to detect changes in occupancy over time. Her research will be a valuable tool in understanding barred owls' impact on the forests and the threat to the endangered northern spotted owl.



Acknowledgments

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 Kerry Heise, botanical surveys

Hiatt Logging Inc., logging and roadwork

Jacobszoon and Associates Inc., timber inventory and timber harvest plan writing

Darcie Mahoney, botanical surveys

Tim Marsh, security

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Don Miller, security

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Mike Stephens, northern spotted owl biological surveys

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Mark Taylor, security

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Wylatti Resource Management, roadwork and bridge building

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John Hooper, Oz Farm

Alan Levine, Coast Action Group

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Contact Us

Please see our website for more information on the North Coast Forest Conservation Initiative:

www.conservationfund.org

Detailed monitoring reports are also available by topic from our office in Caspar, CA:

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