



THE  
CONSERVATION  
FUND

LAND SUSTAINS US

# North Coast Forest Conservation Initiative

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2024 ANNUAL REVIEW



# Caspar Index

Named after our North Coast hometown, this is a customized index that shares some of the important forest health and economic indicators we measure and track. Past North Coast Reviews are available at: [www.conservationfund.org/projects/north-coast-forest-conservation-initiative/north-coast-reference-documents](http://www.conservationfund.org/projects/north-coast-forest-conservation-initiative/north-coast-reference-documents).

	2022	2023	2024
<b>Water Quality*</b>			
Big River Forest lowest summer stream temperature (mean weekly average temperature)	57 (Upper Two Log Creek)	57 (Upper Two Log Creek)	58 (Lower Two Log Creek)
Big River Forest highest summer stream temperature (mean weekly average temperature)	68 (Mainstream Big River at eastern property line)	68 (Mainstream Big River at eastern property line)	70 (Mainstream Big River at eastern property line)
<b>Forest Economics**</b>			
Estimated local economic contribution (employment, contractors, purchases)	\$4.3 million	\$4.6 million	\$3.6 million
Volume of logs removed (gross board feet)	5,004,970	4,562,100	2,860,830
Number of log truckloads to mill	1,095	968	596
Verified forest carbon offsets	258,500 Buckeye Forest verification is still in progress	171,805 Buckeye Forest verification is still in progress	Verification in progress
Miles driven by an average passenger car*** that are equal to above forest carbon offsets	684,400,614	437,511,665	Verification in progress
<b>Community Outreach</b>			
Number of participants in the Pedestrian and Equestrian Stewardship Access Program on Salmon Creek, Big River	10	12	10
Public tours	3	2	2
<b>Northern Spotted Owl Conservation</b>			
Northern spotted owl activity centers	29	29	29
Northern spotted owls successfully fledged	2 – Garcia 1 – Salmon Creek	1 – Garcia	2 – Garcia
Forest acres set aside for northern spotted owl habitat	2,900	2,900	2,900
<b>Coho Salmon and Steelhead Trout Conservation</b>			
Approximate cubic yards of sediment saved through road improvement projects	295	859	683
California Department of Fish and Wildlife salmonid spawner survey reaches sampled	5	5	5
Numbers of logs added to streams to improve salmonid habitat	102 in Buckeye Creek	0	0

\*Stream temperatures fluctuate annually due to changes in solar radiation, air temperature, riparian vegetation and streamflow.

\*\*Economic contribution is influenced by the volume of logs sold, which is affected by log price based on supply and demand, overall economy, mill production and logging expenses.

\*\*\*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](http://www.epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator).



# 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, including environmental restoration, sustainable timber harvests, sale of carbon offsets and support of 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 major accomplishments, challenges and activities of our program in 2024. 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.



# Habitat Restoration

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High priority strategies for salmon habitat restoration are focused both instream and across our more than 500 miles of road infrastructure to reduce the amount of sediment that ends up in the waterways. Road maintenance is critical for reducing road-borne sediment and maintaining access for other restoration projects, as well as botanical and northern spotted owl surveys.

Through the timber harvest plan process, we upgraded 16.4 miles of road in the forests at 62 sites, with 683 cubic yards of sediment savings. Road upgrades include installing water diversion features (water bars and rolling dips) to divert water from the road surface, and placing culverts at stream crossings. Erosion control and prevention work (storm-proofing) applied on a watershed scale is the first and perhaps most important step when restoring watersheds and their anadromous fish populations where sediment running off into the stream is a limiting factor to fisheries production.

Trout Unlimited has completed the design plan of the Big River Salmonid Rearing Habitat and Large Wood Enhancement Project on The Conservation Fund's Big River Forest. The goal of the project is to restore salmonid habitat complexity in a three-mile reach of the mainstem of Big River, by installing moderate to large-scale engineered log jam structures. These structures will be used to create habitat diversity and complexity for coho salmon, steelhead trout and Chinook salmon to improve both summer and winter rearing conditions. The next step is to secure funding for implementation.

Enrichment planting of seedlings is another important element of habitat restoration. In 2024, we planted 10,000 redwood seedlings specifically cultivated for high elevation sites in the Big River and Gualala River forests. The planting took place following a timber harvest to provide a new age-class of trees within the forest, creating a complex multi-age and diverse stand structure for the long-term health of the forest.







## Facts about Coast Redwoods

*(Sequoia sempervirens)*



They are the tallest trees on Earth, reaching heights of over 350 feet — higher than a 30-floor skyscraper.



These ancient trees can live for over 2,000 years, with some exceeding 2,200 years. Some coast redwoods living today were alive during the time of the Roman Empire.



Redwood forests are vital for maintaining stable soil and clean water. Redwood forests filter trillions of gallons of water annually.







## Timber Harvests

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The total volume of sustainably harvested trees in 2024 was 2,860,830 gross board feet from Big River and Salmon Creek Forests. We continue to harvest at or below the agreed upon volume in our forest management plans and our CalFire approved Sustained Yield Plan.

All redwood and Douglas fir logs were harvested by local logging companies and sold 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.



### Did You Know?

A report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that foresters believe they have the happiest and most meaningful work of any major industry.

*Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' American Time Use Survey*



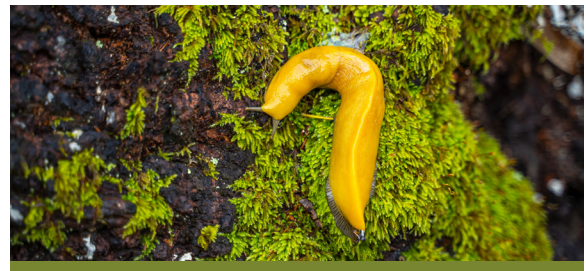


## Forest Certification

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 2024.

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: [conservationfund.org/projects/north-coast-forest-conservation-initiative/north-coast-reference-documents](https://conservationfund.org/projects/north-coast-forest-conservation-initiative/north-coast-reference-documents)



### Did You Know?

Redwood forests are home to a diverse array of wildlife — marbled murrelets, northern spotted owls, banana slugs and a variety of salamanders.

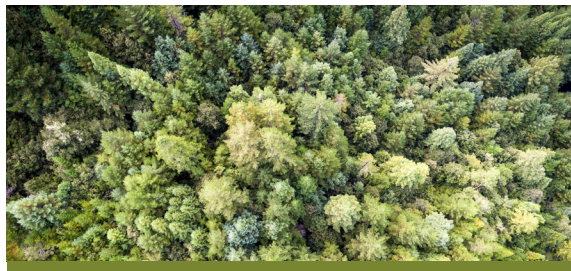




## Climate Action

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Forest conservation is a critical tool 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 over harvesting. The emergence of a market for carbon credits stimulated by California's 2006 Global Warming Solutions Act allowed us to purchase additional lands, reduce harvest levels and accelerate the pace of watershed restoration. Our North Coast forest carbon projects comply with California Air Resources Board (CARB) forest offset protocols and are verified to ensure that the carbon offsets are real, verifiable, additional, enforceable and permanent.



### Did You Know?

Redwood forests are effective carbon sinks, absorbing and storing large amounts of carbon dioxide.





## Public Access Program

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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 Forest, we provide local community members access to cut firewood for home use. Since 2012, we have allowed limited permit-based hunting in the Garcia River Forest to local residents. In addition, multiple tours of all our forests to review timber harvests and restoration projects are offered throughout the year. We are currently evaluating the potential for providing expanded public access to Buckeye Forest. Please contact [hnewberger@conservationfund.org](mailto:hnewberger@conservationfund.org) to sign up for any of these public access opportunities.



### Did You Know?

The coast redwood is one of the world's fastest-growing conifers, or cone-bearing trees. In contrast to the tree's size, redwood cones are very small — only about an inch long.



# Spotlight

When TCF purchased the Big River and Salmon Creek forests in 2006, we entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the project funders — State Water Resources Control Board, the California State Coastal Conservancy and the Wildlife Conservation Board — to outline the intended forest management of the property.

In May 2024, the MOU was replaced with conservation easements. TCF conveyed the Big River Forest and the Salmon Creek Forest conservation easements covering the entire 16,363 acres to the Mendocino Land Trust. Forest Management Plans have been updated and prepared for both forests. Big River and Salmon Creek forests will continue to be managed as working forests that will maintain and enhance habitat for the northern spotted owl, coho Salmon and steelhead trout by increasing structural diversity, high canopy closure, late seral forest characteristics, and maturity of the riparian forests that promote and restore cold-water fisheries. The Mendocino Land Trust will be responsible for monitoring activities on the properties, ensuring that the conservation easement provisions are followed and that forest management is consistent with the Forest Management Plans.

In July 2024, the Mendocino Land Trust and The Conservation Fund hosted a gathering of staff and stakeholders on the Big River Forest to celebrate the conclusion of the year-long process of completing the conservation easement and Forest Management Plan.





# Acknowledgments

## PROJECT PARTNERS & FINANCIAL SUPPORTERS

California Department of Fish and Wildlife

California State Coastal Conservancy

Conrad Forest Products

David and Lucile Packard Foundation

Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation

Mendocino County Resource Conservation District

Mendocino Forest Products

Mendocino Land Trust

North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board

North Fork Lumber Company

Redwood Empire

Richard King Mellon Foundation

S.D. Bechtel Jr. Foundation

Salmon Creek Project Team

Schmidbauer Lumber Company, Inc.

Sonoma Land Trust

Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District

The Nature Conservancy

Trout Unlimited

California Wildlife Conservation Board

Willits Redwood Company

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Noyo Forestry, LLC  
*Roadwork*

Pacific Watershed Associates  
*Road Assessments and Restoration*

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Redwood Forest Foundation, Inc.  
*Northern Spotted Owl Biological Surveys*

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## Contact Us

Please see our website for more information on the North Coast Forest Conservation Initiative: [conservationfund.org](http://conservationfund.org). Detailed monitoring reports are also available by topic from our office in Caspar, CA:

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