

advertisement | your ad here

The mileage program that wants you to use your miles. [BOOK](#)

home of the

Subscribe to the weekend Chronicle

Search



SFGate



Web Search by YAHOO!



Businesses | Advanced

Bay Area & State Nation World Politics Crime Tech Obituaries Education Green Science Health We

The unlikely *instigator* of San Francisco's *political war over pensions*. [Find out more S](#)

Noyo River redwood deal comes with big catch

Peter Fimrite, Chronicle Staff Writer

Friday, October 15, 2010



PRINT



E-MAIL



SHARE



COMMENTS (73)



FONT | SIZE:



Brant Ward / The Chronicle

Willits Redwood Co. co-owner Chris Baldo rides the Skunk Train through the property a group hopes to save.

**(10-15) 04:00 PDT
Willits, Mendocino
County --**

A gargantuan redwood tree towered above the locomotive as it chugged through the forested [Noyo River](#) canyon in [Mendocino County](#), prompting gasps of delight from some of the train's passengers.

222



The massive sequoia, with branches so large and tangled that smaller trees were actually growing out of dirt and litter on the limbs, is part of one of the last, biggest old-growth forests in private hands left on the West Coast.

The ancient trees cover 123 acres of a 426-acre plot of land along the historic [Skunk Train](#) route. Today, the San Francisco-based [Save the Redwoods League](#) will announce it has reached an agreement to buy the plot - a deal that has one major catch.

IMAGES



[View All Images \(4\)](#)

MORE NEWS

Chile miners: From world fame to humble homes 10.17.10

Mortgage default-prevention program offers payment 10.17.10

Food is key ingredient in health care 10.17.10

The league, which has worked for more than 90 years to protect ancient redwoods, needs to raise the \$7 million sale price by April 1 or the current owner, Willits Redwood Co., will log the big trees, which are worth big dollars as lumber.

Ruskin Hartley, the executive director of Save the Redwoods, called it an "urgent situation" that will require public and private support.

"It is more than 100 acres of old growth in an area where there really aren't any more stands of old growth," he said. "The goal here is to have people come out and enjoy the woods."

The league's Rails Through the Redwoods fundraising campaign is one of the most ambitious efforts ever undertaken to save a California forest.

The property, which also contains huge stands of ancient [Douglas fir](#), is surrounded by private property, making it unsuitable for incorporation into a state or national park, as has happened with other Redwood League purchases.

The idea is to buy the property located west of Willits and then turn it over to a permanent steward, preferably a local conservation organization or land trust.

Ideally, a partnership would be worked out with the owner of the Skunk Train, which has the right of way for 6 miles of railroad tracks that zigzag through the lush hills and verdant valleys along the ancient Noyo riverbed.

Old lumber railroad

The railroad was established in 1885 to haul lumber. When the connection to Willits was completed in 1911, the railroad wound 40 miles through vast redwood stands that were used to build the cities of the West.

People began calling it the "skunk" train in 1925 because of the acrid fumes from the gasoline and diesel rail engines. The last old-growth trees were harvested in the late 1970s and the train is now used by the Sierra Railroad Co. exclusively for tourists.

Hartley's vision is for the train to bring schoolchildren and other interested groups into the region, where on-board biologists would explain the redwood forest ecosystem, lead tours and organize camping expeditions in ecologically important areas.

The fundraising effort might have to go on for a while as there will undoubtedly be costs associated with managing the property and building infrastructure, including shoring up failed culverts along the river.

During a recent tour of the property, Hartley and several of his colleagues rode on the train's open viewing platform past granite cliffs, giant trees and shimmering pools surrounded by lush moss and ferns. Waterfalls dot the river. Long-abandoned mining camps pepper the route, with rotting old barns, shacks and rusted equipment.

The train slowed as it passed the giant, gnarled redwood with trees growing out of it. Emily Limm, the league's director of science, said the thick, sprawling branches create habitat for bats, mammals like red tree voles and a wide variety of birds, which set up housekeeping from the base of the tree all the way to the top, more than 200 feet high.

"These trees really are ecosystems in and of themselves," Limm said.

The Noyo River redwoods provide habitat for numerous rare, threatened and endangered species, including the northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, bald eagle and the Pacific fisher.

Bats live in the charred hollows of redwoods, Limm said. The northern red-legged frog and southern torrent salamander live in the wetland areas near the headwaters of the Noyo. Coho, steelhead and chinook salmon breed in the river, and numerous rare plants, vines and flowers grow throughout the region.

Permission to log

The Willits Redwood Co. went through a difficult and lengthy approval process before the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection accepted its timber harvest plan. Co-owner Chris Baldo said top-grade old-growth wood, which is thicker, has fewer knot holes and is sturdier, can fetch up to \$10 a board foot compared with \$1.80 a board foot for second-growth redwood.

"That was one of the values of this property to us," said Baldo, who, with business partner Bruce Burton purchased the property for about \$2 million in 2007. "There are people who feel that saving old growth is the most important thing to do in the world, but I've always felt that if they feel that way they should raise the money and buy it."

Hartley said there have been discussions with a number of potential donors, but no money has yet materialized.




"We hope that the public will join us in providing protection for this property," Hartley said. "As California gets more and more crowded, these places where you can get away from it all become more and more precious."

Quick Facts about Noyo River redwoods

- The 426-acre property contains 123 acres of ancient and old forest - about 30 percent of all remaining ancient and old forest in the Noyo River watershed
- Property will protect habitat for 40 rare and imperiled species including the northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, salmon and white-flowered rein orchid
- \$7 million must be raised by April 1, 2011
- Visit SaveTheRedwoods.org/Noyo to sign up for a behind the scenes tour
- Log on to www.skunktrain.com for the most recent train schedule

E-mail Peter Fimrite at pfimrite@sfgate.com.

*This article appeared on page **A - 1** of the San Francisco Chronicle*

 PRINT  E-MAIL  SHARE

222  share



Subscribe to the San Francisco Chronicle and get a gift:

- Sunday + a \$15 gift card
- Fri-Sun + a \$15 gift card
- Mon-Sun + a \$25 gift card

Select an offer

Read More

Powered by 

From SFGate.com:

Railroad CSX 3Q profit jumps 43 percent



Eucalyptus trees felled over homeowner's...



Jericho unveils massive ancient mosaic

Visitors to ancient Jericho got a rare glimpse Sunday of a massive 1,200-year-old carpet mosaic measuring nearly 900 square meters (9,700 square feet), making it one of the largest in the Middle East. The... [More »](#)

A Park, Kids and Fruit Trees



From Around the Web:

Group races against clock to save redwoods from logging

10/15/2010 — Greenspace

Enviro group reaches deal for North Coast forest

10/15/2010 — Seattle Post-Intelligencer: Business

Habitat restoration grant

10/14/2010 — Boston Globe -- Today's paper A to Z

Hotline Spotlight: The Forest For The Trees

10/11/2010 — Hotline On Call

Hiking Georgia's Jacks River Trail

10/13/2010 — Examiner Travel Channel Articles



[The Asian secret to strong, lush hair](#)

[Shocking discovery for joint relief](#)

[Age 55 or older? Pay up to 75% less for your cruise](#)

ADVERTISEMENT

Related Topics: Lumber, Save-the-Redwoods League, Old-growth forest, Douglas-fir, Mendocino County, California, Forest, Endangered species, Noyo River, West Coast of the United States, California Western Railroad



Add Your Comment

New to the site?

To use commenting, you need to sign up.

Already a member?

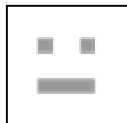
Please log in. [\(Forgot Password?\)](#)

Username

Password

Remember Me

Most Popular Comments



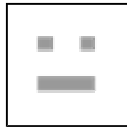
ironmyke 4:39 AM on October 15, 2010

Acquire old growth forest for \$2 mil. Then hold it hostage for a \$7 mil ransom. The American entrepreneurial spirit lives on.

 [REPLY](#)  (93)  (13) POPULARITY: 80

 |  |  [Report Abuse]

5 replies



vistringhero 6:25 AM on October 15, 2010

Oh wow. I have been through those groves and they are absolutely gorgeous compared to the rest of the forest in the area. That is such a damn shame. There are just some things that should be sacred.

REPLY (76) (1) POPULARITY: 75 [Report Abuse]

5 replies



mikeinsnowbird 6:29 AM on October 15, 2010

The lumber people can boff themselves. These are the most magnificent trees on Earth. These stands of giant Sequoia Sempervirens are like Earth's altars. How can anyone come in and just mow 'em down?

REPLY (72) (7) POPULARITY: 65 [Report Abuse]

3 replies

[View Comments \(73\)](#)



Wedding bells ring in school



Collins off 'Project' but not runways



Photos: Musical Treasure trove



50 years to life for TV contestant



TV mom Barbara Billingsley dies

Ads by Yahoo!

Invest in Gold: Learn How

Gold Delivered to Your Door. Free Investor Kit. Since 1960.
(Goldline.com/Gold)

Discountadvances.com - Official Site

Cheaper, Better, Faster. Secure Cash. Bad Credit OK. Up to \$1500.
(DiscountAdvances.com)

Don't Pay For School - Free Scholarships

Sign Up for Free Scholarship Guide. Millions Are Available For You.
(ProgramAdvisor.com/FreeScholarships)

[Home](#) [News](#) [Sports](#) [Business](#) [Entertainment](#) [Food](#) [Living](#) [Travel](#) [Columns](#) [Buy & Sell](#) [Jobs](#) [Real Estate](#) [Cars](#)

Advertising Services: [Advertise with us](#) [Place a Classified](#) [About Our Ads](#) [Public Notices](#) [Local Businesses: Business Direc](#)

Reader Services: [Home Delivery](#) [Subscribers](#) [E-Edition](#) [Mobile](#) [RSS Feeds](#) [Newsletters](#) [Feedback](#) [Buy Photos](#) [FAQ](#)

Company Info: [Contact Us](#) [Hearst Corp.](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Terms and Conditions](#) [Work for Us](#) [Chronicle in Education](#) [Ever](#)

© 2010 Hearst Communications Inc.

