



## Case Study

# PROTECTING “THE GIANTS” NORTHERN CALIFORNIA, U.S.A.

*A long-term partnership between a species-specific organization and The Nature Conservancy reaps large dividends for both organizations in protecting a totemic forest denizen and the large-scale landscape that supports it – with little documentation needed.*

From Alaska to California, a huge swath of North America is robed in temperate rainforests. In Northern California, a sparsely populated region of a very populated state, these landscapes still support salmon runs, black bear, marbled murrelets and wolverines. A subset of these old growth forests includes the redwoods, giant prehistoric trees whose bark and inner wood have a distinct reddish cast. Redwoods can grow to 350 feet – the largest living beings on earth.

The Nature Conservancy’s California Chapter has been active in the region since the late 1950’s when the organization’s first western preserve was purchased here to protect an old growth forest containing redwoods.

Another non-profit, the Save the Redwoods League, has been active in the region since 1918, protecting the last redwood tree forests from complete destruction by the timber harvests during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Less than 5% of the ancient coast redwood forests remain. The League has protected 59 parks encompassing more than 181,000 acres, often setting aside entire watersheds, ridge to ridge, providing habitat for a wide variety of plants and animals in addition to redwood trees.

Today, the threat of poorly managed logging, development and rapid climate change threatens not only the forest protection victories of the past, but also the very future of “the giants.”

Despite a natural shared vision for the conservation action needed for much of the 1.6 million acres of the remaining old growth redwood forest, the Conservancy and the League worked separately until 2002 when the Conservancy’s North Coast Director was invited to join the League’s Board of Councilors. This invitation spurred a strong and lasting partnership between the groups that has needed little official documentation.

Because of the clear, shared vision, no written documentation was required to formalize the partnership. From the beginning the partnership was marked by a strong, two-way conversation and information exchange. The Conservancy shared a regional, science-based conservation plan that strengthened the League’s conservation capacity and also introduced them to the “Conservation by Design” methodology. The League then used this information to create a conservation master plan for the region.

Even though the relationship remains “undocumented,” with no binding or even non-binding agreements, the partnership has been extremely effective. There is now a conservation master plan

### 3.B.1. Non-Documented Relationships

that includes many Conservancy priorities, and the partnership has also produced successful joint community outreach, publicity, lobbying, and deal negotiations.

In focus group testing of their members, the League has found that the supporters who feel compelled to protect “the Giants” invariably describe their connection and feelings about them in almost mystical terms. The League is involved in catalyzing redwood-specific public support in a way that the Conservancy, which usually avoids single species focus, never could. A recent partnership between the League and The National Geographic Society, a renowned nature adventure media and travel nonprofit, has brought even more attention to these important forests.

While the relationship remains undocumented, great care was still taken regarding standard reputational and legal protection in situations when money would be changing hands. For example, a standard conflict of interest form was signed, and in one instance, Conservancy protocols prevented the staff that sat on the League’s Board of Councilors from participating in deal negotiations for a parcel of land that involved both organizations. Nevertheless, even though the partnership is undocumented, it is not always informal. Staff have signed legal documents and recused<sup>1</sup> themselves from certain transactional activities based on standard operating procedures.

Overall, the robust connection between parties has returned very positive results for both organizations. Each party trusts the other, both because of the well-established staff connection and the shared conservation vision for California Redwoods habitat. The Conservancy has been able to strengthen the Leagues’ scientific approach, as well as its long-term strategic planning methodologies.

The undocumented nature of the partnership continues to work, much to the delight of people who love redwoods.

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<sup>1</sup> *Recuse -- to disqualify or seek to disqualify from participation in a decision on grounds such as prejudice or personal involvement.*

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