

# What's Going On in Richardson Grove?

**Richardson Grove State Park**, covering approximately 2,000 acres, was put into the public trust almost a century ago, and it is home to the ninth largest tree of all remaining Coast redwoods.

Caltrans is proposing to "realign" and widen Highway 101 through Richardson Grove in response to Governor Schwarzenegger's 2006 Strategic Growth Plan that proposed changes to north coast highways to enable interstate "STAA" trucks full access to Del Norte and Humboldt Counties. Under the Surface Transportation Assistance Act of 1982, STAA trucks cannot legally transport materials through this area because of road size limits in Richardson Grove State Park and Big Lagoon, just south of Crescent City.<sup>1</sup>

The Grove Group, a coalition of environmental, business and citizen groups in Humboldt County, are calling for a **full CEQA and NEPA review, publishing a resulting environmental impact study and report for full public examination and comment. We are circulating a petition to Governor Schwarzenegger, Congressman Mike Thompson, Assemblywoman Patty Berg, State Senator Pat Wiggins, and State Senator Al Lowenthal, the Chair of the CA Senate Transportation Committee. Please sign on to show your support.**

*Caltrans has said:*

*Nothing bigger than a few 18-inch maple trees will be cut*

**What they plan to do:** A triangle of Park land with about 7 trees will be sliced off of a curve on the west side of the highway. About 30 trees of varying age (no old-growth) will come down from private property adjacent to the Park as road-shoulder and rock-fall allowances are created. A retaining wall will be constructed along the north end of the affected stretch of highway, some 260 feet long and between six and fifteen feet high.

*Caltrans (and the County Economic Development Office) says:*

*Humboldt County businesses are disadvantaged because they can't use STAA size trucks to ship their goods in and out of the county, paying extra for switching cabs and trailers prior to entering Humboldt and the only way to alleviate this is to widen the road and risk health of our old-growth grove.*

**Are these businesses the only ones affected?** Many SoHum businesses will be disadvantaged by construction and subsequent changes brought on by bigger trucks coming through this area. Apparently no one has asked the Northern Mendocino and Southern Humboldt tourist businesses for their opinions. How might these changes affect tourist-based businesses? Southern Humboldt provided just under 60% of the County's bed-tax revenue this past year. **County-wide, who will benefit and who will suffer from the influx of bigger trucks? Are there alternatives to this solution? Should we allow trucking companies to force us to shift to bigger trucks when in fact the oil crisis is reconfiguring transportation priorities and strategies by the minute?**

*Caltrans says:*

*This proposal is environmentally sound.*

**Road compaction** has a detrimental impact on redwood tree root systems, and may be a factor in the die-back we see among the redwoods along the Avenue of the Giants. The realignment proposal would move the road up to 17 feet into the Grove, raking away the layer of soil in which

---

<sup>1</sup> The Legislature exempted cattle trucks from this regulation in 2007.

these intricate root systems thrive, most likely **cutting life-giving roots** and placing ancient trees even closer to the edge of the highway.

We are only now beginning to comprehend the quantities of water released by trees and their contribution to the watershed—*any* trees we lose in this Grove are going to cause additional water loss for the Eel River. ***Can we afford further degradation with our current low flows?***

Caltrans and the County Economic Development Office have repeatedly been unable to predict what the “improvement plan” will mean in terms of **increased traffic** through the Grove. ***What is the impact of increased truck traffic and greenhouse gas emissions on climate change?***

***Does Caltrans plan an assessment of the economic impact of the construction itself and the resulting change? Does Caltrans plan to compensate Piercy Fire District for its impact on our ability to respond to local emergencies?***

**Caltrans has not been transparent about this project.**

A “technical advisory group” worked with Caltrans last year to develop this plan: California Dept. of Parks and Recreation, the InterTribal Sinkyone Wilderness Council, the Sierra Club, the Humboldt Cattlemen’s Association, the Save-the-Redwoods League, CHP, the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors, and the California Trucking Association. However, members of the TAG could not or would not reveal the details of what was being developed as they met over the next six months or so. Inquiries to CalTrans about the status of the project were met with the statement that there was no plan, studies were being conducted, and the results would be publicly presented at a later date. Thanks to Humboldt County Supervisor Bonnie Neely, who helped us get a walk-through with Caltrans in late January 2008.

Humboldt County depends on the natural resources for our industries of *attraction* here. Only 3% of ancient redwoods still stand. ***Will a change in configuration of Richardson Grove and the resulting increase in traffic of huge tractor-trailers through our Grove really improve our economy? Might it damage the ancient trees over the longer term? What are the cumulative effects of opening up Big Lagoon AND Richardson Grove to provide a through-circuit for STAA traffic?***

CalTrans is conducting “environmental studies according to state and federal guidelines and nothing [they] see so far indicates the need for a full EIR.” We disagree. **Caltrans must NOT move forward without conducting a full CEQA and NEPA review, publishing a resulting environmental impact study and report for full public examination and comment.**

The possibility of adverse cumulative environmental impacts on the Grove, the wildlife that live there, as well as people who enjoy the State Park, is very real. ***We want all our concerns properly assessed and evaluated. Humboldt County CITIZENS will have the final say in the decision to cut this new road.***

**CalTrans must not move forward on this project until it holds a complete set of public hearings not only in Eureka but also in Garberville/Redway, Laytonville/ Willits and Ukiah, allowing all affected citizens to be involved in the decision-making process.**

Produced by members of the Grove Group, a Garberville-Redway community coalition. For more information, email [skywriter@asis.com](mailto:skywriter@asis.com) or see [www.wildcalifornia.org/pages/page-271](http://www.wildcalifornia.org/pages/page-271).