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### **Challenge Seeks to Halt California Highway Project That Would Destroy Ancient Redwoods**

SAN FRANCISCO— A coalition of conservation groups and local residents today asked a federal judge to stop California transportation officials from moving ahead with a controversial highway project that would jeopardize ancient stands of redwood trees in northern California's Richardson Grove State Park: Case No.3:10-cv-04360 WHA (attached).

The coalition seeks to halt plans by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to realign a section of Highway 101 that winds through old-growth redwoods in the park. The work would require crews to dig into the roots of towering redwoods that stand along the highway within park boundaries. Today's filing asks a judge to stop the project until legal proceedings are complete.

The threat of possibly fatal damage to the prized ancient trees, as well as harm to sensitive wildlife posed by the controversial project, is driving today's legal challenge, which is the second filed by the coalition. Caltrans has failed to evaluate impacts of the project in violation of the National Environmental Policy Act and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

"The importance of this old-growth redwood stand, in view of the important heritage of the redwood forest, requires special consideration before projects that would impact the stand are allowed to go forward," (see attached) Joe McBride, a professor of forestry and landscape architecture at the University of California at Berkeley, said in today's filing. "Substantial, irreparable damage would occur to the trees in the project area. This would, in turn, cause negative impacts to the overall health of the forest."

McBride's finding is based on his scientific review of the potential of impacts to each tree along the project route — a review plaintiffs show Caltrans failed to undertake.

"This project will cause major damage to one of our most prized state parks," said Gary Hughes of the Environmental Protection Information Center, one of the plaintiff groups and spokesman for the coalition. "For Caltrans to railroad this multimillion-dollar project by grossly understating its impacts is a violation of the public's trust and a wasteful use of taxpayer money."

“With less than 3 percent of our ancient redwood trees remaining, we cannot allow Caltrans to injure and kill the precious giant trees of Richardson Grove State Park,” said Peter Galvin, conservation director at the Center for Biological Diversity. “We will fight this project to the end, no matter how long it takes.”

Plaintiffs are Trisha Lee Lotus, Bess Bair, Bruce Edwards, Jeffrey Hedin, Loreen Eliason, Environmental Protection Information Center, Californians for Alternatives to Toxics and the Center for Biological Diversity. They are represented by a team that includes Philip Gregory and former congressman “Pete” McCloskey of Cotchett, Pitre & McCarthy, a law firm in San Francisco.

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