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### **Judge Orders California to Halt Work on Richardson Grove Highway Expansion That Would Harm Ancient Redwoods**

SAN FRANCISCO— A federal judge on Wednesday ordered California state transportation officials to stop work on a controversial plan to cut wider highway lanes through ancient redwoods in Northern California's Richardson Grove State Park. The judge granted the injunction that was being sought by a group of plaintiffs that includes three environmental organizations and several citizens, finding the project is likely to harm trees and may violate federal law.

The judge halted plans by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to realign a section of Highway 101 that winds through old-growth redwoods in the park to accommodate large-truck travel. The work would require crews to extensively cut into the roots of towering redwoods that stand along the highway within park boundaries. The injunction prohibits all on-the-ground construction and even contract advertising, bidding, or awards until the merits of the case are heard. The case is to be heard on Dec. 1, 2011.

The court's decision centers on the controversial project's potentially fatal damage to the prized ancient trees, as well as harm to sensitive wildlife. The plaintiffs charged that Caltrans failed to evaluate impacts of the project in violation of environmental laws such as the National Environmental Policy Act. Those arguments were recognized as valid in Wednesday's court decision granting the injunction. The federal lawsuit accompanies a California state action also filed by the coalition.

"This project would cause irreparable damage to one of our most prized state parks, and this decision confirms the legitimacy of our concerns," said Gary Hughes of the Environmental Protection Information Center, a plaintiff group based in Humboldt County. "We believe that this ruling highlights the ecological importance of the state parks in redwood country, and we hope that decision-makers are beginning to understand the legal and ethical responsibility they have to steward these globally important protected areas for future generations."

“With less than 3 percent of our ancient redwood trees remaining, we cannot allow Caltrans to injure and kill the precious giants of Richardson Grove State Park,” said Jeff Miller with the Center for Biological Diversity. “We hope that with this court decision, Caltrans will scrap this misguided project that would sacrifice redwoods and the endangered species that depend on them for the sake of a few more oversized trucks speeding through the grove.”

Plaintiffs in the case (No. C 10-04360 WHA) 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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