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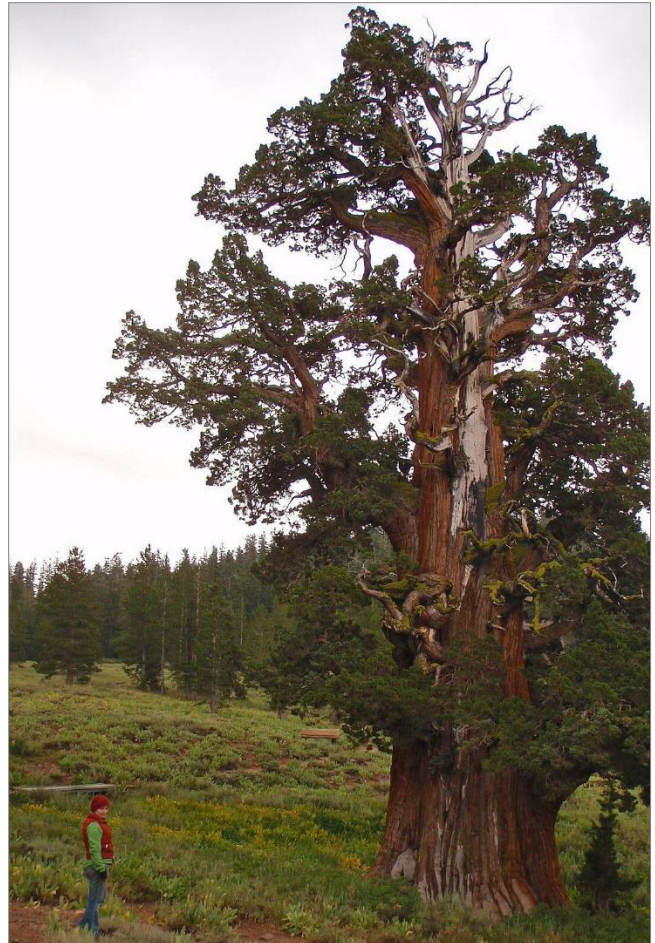Phone: (209) 419-2861 | Email: ellie.motherlodelandtrust@gmail.com

Save the Redwoods League Donates One of the Oldest Trees in the World, Bennett Juniper, to Mother Lode Land Trust

San Francisco, Calif. (November 8, 2022) — Save the Redwoods League today announced that it has entrusted Mother Lode Land Trust (MLLT) with the long-term stewardship of Bennett Juniper, the largest juniper and one of the oldest known trees in the world. The League donated the 3,000-year-old tree and surrounding 3-acre property to MLLT. The Bennett Juniper property has been stewarded by the League since 1987. It is an inholding within Stanislaus National Forest in Tuolumne County, California.

"The Bennett Juniper is an unrivaled specimen of western juniper. This gnarled and knotted tree has withstood drought, hard winters and lightning strikes for thousands of years," said **Ellie Routt**, executive director of Mother Lode Land Trust. "MLLT's ownership of this property ensures local oversight and permanent protection so that everyone can have the chance to see this amazing tree."

"When Save the Redwoods League protects a forest, often, that's just the beginning of the story, not the end," said **Anthony Castaños**, land stewardship manager for Save the Redwoods League. "After more than 30 years of stewarding the Bennett Juniper property,

Bennett Juniper, the largest known juniper tree in the world, is estimated to be more than 3,000 years old. Photo courtesy of Save the Redwoods League.

we're pleased to convey this remarkable place to Mother Lode Land Trust. The organization has the capacity and local ties to ensure its future most readily."

About the Bennett Juniper
The Bennett Juniper tree is the largest known juniper tree in existence. It is 86 feet tall and 39.9 feet around. Other western juniper trees average 50-70 feet in height.

The Bennett Juniper is among the oldest living trees in the world. It is estimated to be between 3,000 and 4,000 years old, with some believing it's even older. The tree has been studied numerous times, including by Peter Brown from the University of Arizona Tree Ring Lab. In 1989, Brown estimated that the tree is approximately 3,000 years old; however, he also discovered decayed wood and a hollow section about 2 feet into the core samples. Given these voids in the tree rings, the exact age of the Bennett Juniper may never be known.

The tree is named after naturalist Clarence Bennett, who studied western juniper trees from Oregon to Mexico. In 1932, after hearing of Bennett's studies, Ed Burgeson, a local sheep rancher, led Bennett to the large juniper tree. It turned out to be the largest juniper that Bennett had encountered. For years thereafter, Bennett continued to advocate for the tree's protection, and in the 1950s the USDA Forest Service named the tree after Bennett.

Other large juniper trees can also be found on the property, including a pair that looks like they're dancing, according to locals. These trees are nicknamed Fred and Ginger for their resemblance to Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.

Ensuring the Protection of the Bennett Juniper
Nonprofit organizations have stewarded the Bennett Juniper property for more than 40 years as protected open space.

To establish formal protections for the famed tree, Joseph W. Martin, Sr. donated the 3-acre Bennett Juniper property to The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in 1978. By the 1980s, increased visitation had significantly degraded the property. TNC restored and stewarded the land for about nine years before they conveyed it to Save the Redwoods League in June 1987.

Although the League is best known for protecting coast redwood and giant sequoia forests, it took on the responsibility of managing the Bennett Juniper property for 35 years. The League's stewardship team installed protective fencing around the Bennett Juniper's base and the boundary of the property. It has also installed interpretive panels to provide information and background about the tree and its history. Notably, the League hired Ken Brunges as caretaker in 1988. Brunges lived onsite and diligently protected the Bennett Juniper for three decades.

After Brunges' exit, and with careful consideration and discussion between the nonprofit organizations, the League determined that MLLT, a more localized organization, would be best suited to manage the property going forward. Effective November 4, 2022, the League has donated the property, along with $40,000 in seed funding toward its long-term stewardship, to the Mother Lode Land Trust, continuing the legacy of nonprofit stewardship for this remarkable specimen.

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To schedule an interview, contact Robin Carr at (415) 766-0927 or redwoods@landispr.com.

Save the Redwoods League
One of the nation's longest-running conservation organizations, Save the Redwoods League has been protecting and restoring redwood forests since 1918. The League has connected generations of visitors with the beauty and serenity of the redwood forest. Our 240,000 supporters have enabled the League to protect more than 220,000 acres of irreplaceable forests in 66 state, national and local parks and reserves. For information, please visit SaveTheRedwoods.org.

Mother Lode Land Trust
The Mother Lode Land Trust (MLLT) helps protect the rural character, ranching and agriculture, and scenic beauty of California's Sierra Nevada for current and future generations to enjoy. MLLT secures land through conservation easements, working with private landowners to preserve wildlife habitat, scenic vistas, open space, recreation and agriculture. MLLT also purchases unique properties and holds them in our ownership to ensure that there are local places for public access, historical and agriculture interpretation and preservation, outdoor educational opportunities with schools and the public, and the protection of critical wildlife habitat. For more information, visit MotherLodeLandTrust.org.

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