

# PARKER SETTLEMENT MONEY TO PAY FOR NEW PFEIFFER FALLS TRAIL

By CHRIS COUNTS

**JUST DAYS** after learning they will receive \$345,000 from entrepreneur Sean Parker, officials at the non-profit Save-the-Redwoods League talked about what they plan to do with the money — revive the once-popular Pfeiffer Falls Trail at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park. The trail has been closed since it was damaged in the 2008 Basin Complex Fire.

The grant represents about one-quarter of nearly \$1.4 million Parker will donate to a variety of Big Sur conservation and public access projects, the California Coastal Commission announced last week.

The money is part of a \$2.5 million settlement Parker agreed to pay because his wedding at the Ventana Campground violated state law. The balance is earmarked for similar projects.

For decades, the Pfeiffer Falls Trail was one of Big Sur's busiest — and easiest — hiking routes. With the aid of five bridges, the trail meandered past the towering trees along

aptly-named Redwood Creek, traveling less than a mile from the Big Sur Lodge before reaching a viewing platform at the base of a 60-foot waterfall.

But the trail was damaged in the 2008 fire and its viewing platform was destroyed. It's been closed since, and to see the falls, hikers now need to use a longer and steeper route, the Oak Grove Trail.

## A complete redesign

Instead of simply fixing the trail, state park officials decided to redesign it. Since 2008, they've worked with the Save-the-Redwoods League to clean up the fire damage and create a new trail alignment.

"The trail crossed the creek five times, which became a maintenance issue," explained John Hiles, a state parks road and trails supervisor.

"Also, after the fire, huge debris flows changed the topography of the creek. We plan to move the trail higher up on the ridge and get it out of the creek bed," he said.

The first phase of the project, which has been completed, involved cleaning up debris and restoring the creek bed. The Save-the-Redwoods League donated \$12,500 to fund erosion control efforts and pay for state parks staff to oversee California Conservation Corps workers.

The second phase, which is underway now, involves designing the new trail and getting permits. The Save-the-Redwoods League is contributing \$30,000 toward the effort. The Monterey County Planning Department will have to sign off on the work.

Not only will the new trail offer the public a quicker and easier way to reach the waterfall, but it will relieve pressure on the Oak Grove Trail, which is suffering from overuse.

"Over 500,000 visitors a year come to the park," said Jessica Neff, the project manager for Save-the-Redwoods League. "[The Pfeiffer Falls Trail] was the most popular trail in the park. People loved it."

Officials hope to break ground on the project in Spring 2016 and open it by Spring 2017.

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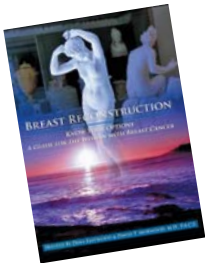
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