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Save the Redwoods League, the Yurok Tribe, and Park Partners Sign Historic Agreement to Return Tribal Land

*Partners to co-manage public access at future gateway to
Redwood National and State Parks*

Orick, CA (March 19, 2024) — Today [the Yurok Tribe](#), [Save the Redwoods League](#), [National Park Service](#) and [California State Parks](#) signed a landmark memorandum of understanding, a historic first step toward transferring ‘O Rew, a 125-acre ecologically and culturally important property, from Save the Redwoods League back to its original steward, the Yurok Tribe. In addition, the agreement describes the four partners’ shared vision for long-term co-management of the site as a gateway for the visiting public to the adjacent Redwood National and State Parks (RNSP). This would be a first-ever cooperative arrangement for the National Park Service and California State Parks on tribe-owned land. The partners envision building a new visitor and cultural center and trails at ‘O Rew that will highlight the distinct histories and cultures of local tribes.

“On behalf of the Yurok people, I want to sincerely thank Save the Redwoods League for committing to repatriate this critical part of our homeland. Together, we are creating a new conservation model that recognizes the value of tribal land management,” said **Joseph L. James**, the Chairman of the Yurok Tribe. “We are also appreciative of Redwood National and State Parks’ participation in this truly one-of-a-kind partnership.”

“Today we acknowledge and celebrate the opportunity to return Indigenous guardianship to ‘O Rew and reimagine how millions of visitors from around the world experience the redwoods,” said **Sam Hodder**, president and CEO of Save the Redwoods League. “Today’s agreement starts the process of changing the narrative about how, by whom and for whom we steward natural lands. There’s a lot of important work to be done in the coming years to realize our shared vision. But the League and our partners are fully committed, and we’re honored to collaborate with the Yurok Tribe, National Park Service and California State Parks to create a new model of shared environmental and recreational stewardship.”

New Trail Access and Cultural Gateway to RNSP

The vision codified in today's memorandum of understanding is for Save the Redwoods League to convey 'O Rew to the Yurok Tribe in 2026, after the Redwoods Gateway and Prairie Creek Restoration project, currently in progress, is completed. Conveniently located off U.S. Highway 101 at the base of Bald Hills Road in Orick, CA, the site will become a southern gateway to Redwood National and State Parks. The 'O Rew Redwoods Gateway will be the first co-management model whereby National Park Service and California State Parks will support visitation and stewardship on land owned by a Tribe.

Critical elements of the new recreational and cultural gateway will be built in 2025 prior to the transfer. These comprise more than 1 mile of accessible new trails, including a new segment of the California Coastal Trail, interpretive exhibits across the site and other visitor amenities. The new trails will connect to numerous existing trails in the parks, including direct access to one of the most popular old-growth redwood groves in the parks, Lady Bird Johnson Grove.

The agreement outlines that, after the transfer, the Yurok Tribe aims to construct a visitor center highlighting the distinct history and living culture of the Tribe and the extraordinary natural, cultural and recreational resources of the parks. The Yurok Tribe also plans to build a traditional village on-site, including plank houses and a sweat house.

"This is a first-of-its-kind arrangement, where Tribal land is co-stewarded with a national park as its gateway to millions of visitors. This action will deepen the relationship between Tribes and the National Park Service," said Redwoods National Park Superintendent **Steve Mietz**. "The restoration efforts completed by the partners on this site link the large-scale watershed restoration upstream by the [Redwoods Rising](#) collaborative with downstream landowner-led efforts to restore the Redwood Creek Estuary, healing the land while healing the relationships among all the people who inhabit this magnificent forest."

"This agreement further strengthens California State Parks' relationship with the Yurok Tribe, and we welcome the opportunity to forge additional actions that support Indigenous land management with state, federal and nonprofit resources," said **Armando Quintero**, director of California State Parks. "This historic agreement provides a pathway for the addition of Indigenous lands to the suite of values employed in co-managing and protecting Redwood National and State Parks lands for the enjoyment of public and Indigenous peoples in the region."

About 'O Rew

The 125-acre property — 'O Rew in the Yurok language — encompasses a significant place for the Yurok people on Prairie Creek. Located near Orick in Northern California, 'O Rew is roughly in the center of Yurok ancestral territory. During the mid-1800s, there was an attempt to forcibly remove Yurok people from their homeland, including 'O Rew and nearby Ow-r-ekw, to expedite exploitation of the region's natural resources, including old-growth coast redwood trees.

Save the Redwoods League purchased and conserved the site in 2013. Before that, for more than 50 years, it operated as a lumber mill and was referred to as the Orick Mill Site and Mill Site A. While the mill was in operation, large portions of the land were paved over, and much of the natural channel and floodplain of Prairie Creek was buried. For the last 10 years, the League has partnered with accomplished restoration experts, including the Yurok Tribe Construction Corporation and

Fisheries Department and California Trout, to undertake a full restoration of a critical stretch of Prairie Creek on the site for the benefit of federally listed coho salmon and steelhead.

As part of that effort, Yurok Tribe restoration crews built a new, nearly 1-mile-long meandering stream channel with abundant features to support fish, two connected ponds and approximately 20 acres of floodplain habitat. More than 50,000 native plants, including grass-like slough sedge, black cottonwood and coast redwood trees, have been planted in specific locations on the banks of the creek, ponds and floodplain of the Redwood Creek tributary. Thousands of juvenile coho and chinook salmon and steelhead are already taking advantage of the new habitat. Multiple wildlife species are also returning to the restored environment. Red-legged frogs, northwestern salamanders, elk and many species of waterfowl and songbirds have been observed at 'O Rew.

This important and ongoing restoration project at ['O Rew Redwoods Gateway](#) is funded by the following: Save the Redwoods League, California State Coastal Conservancy, California Wildlife Conservation Board, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Restoration Center, California Ocean Protection Council, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Foundation and The Cantus Foundation. California Trout and numerous local professionals and partners have provided essential expertise in the planning and implementation of the project.

Please visit the ['O Rew project web page](#) for additional information and opportunities to support this exciting new initiative.

Note to media: Hi-res images and b-roll are available [here](#). To schedule an interview, contact Matt Mais at (707) 954-0976 or mmais@yuroktribe.nsn.us or Robin Carr at (415) 766-0927 or Redwoods@LandisPR.com.



The Yurok Tribe

With more than 6,400 enrolled members, the [Yurok Tribe](#) is currently the largest Tribe in California. Yurok ancestral territory comprises 7.5 percent of the California coastline, extending from the Little River in Humboldt County to Damnation Creek in Del Norte County. The eastern boundary is the Klamath River's confluence with the Trinity River. The Tribe's more than 500 employees provide numerous services to the local community. The Tribe's major initiatives include: holistic forest management, fisheries protection, restoration and management, Klamath dam removal, condor reintroduction, natural resources conservation, cultural preservation, sustainable economic development and land acquisition.



Save the Redwoods League

[Save the Redwoods League](#), one of the nation's longest-running conservation organizations, has been protecting and restoring redwood forests since 1918. The League has connected generations of visitors with the beauty and serenity of the redwood forests. The nonprofit's 29,000 members have enabled the organization to protect more than 216,000 acres of irreplaceable forest in 66 state, national and local parks and reserves.



National Park Service

The [National Park Service \(NPS\)](#) preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education and inspiration of this and future generations. The NPS cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world.



California State Parks

[California State Parks](#) and the recreational programs supported by its divisions of Boating and Waterways, Historic Preservation, and Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation provide the opportunity for families, friends and communities to connect. Off-highway motor vehicle recreation, boating activities, horseback riding, cycling, hiking, camping, rock climbing, tours, hikes, school group enrichment, and special events are just some of the activities enjoyed in 280 park units organized into 21 field districts throughout the state.

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