

North Coast Forest Conservation Initiative

2017 ANNUAL REVIEW



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THE
CONSERVATION FUND

Caspar Index Named after our North Coast hometown, this is a customized index to share some of the measurements we track. Past North Coast Reviews are available at conservationfund.org.

	2015	2016	2017
Northern Spotted Owl Conservation			
Northern spotted owl activity centers	28	28	28
Northern spotted owl successfully fledged	0	2-Garcia 2- Big River	1-Garcia
Forest acres set aside for northern spotted owl habitat	2,900	2,800	2,800
Coho Salmon and Steelhead Conservation			
Approximate cubic yards of sediment saved through road improvement projects	15,723	5,240	10,019
California Department of Fish and Wildlife spawner survey reaches sampled	6	6	6
Numbers of logs added to streams to improve salmonid habitat	0	75 (East Branch Little North Fork Big River)	8 (Garcia River and Graphite Creek)
Water Quality			
Total number of instream remote water temperature monitoring stations on all forests (Gualala River Watershed Council provides monitoring on Gualala and Buckeye forests)	83	83	83
Big River Forest lowest summer stream temperature Mean Weekly Average temperature	52 (Upper Two Log Creek in Big River)	52 (Lower North Fork Big River)	58 (Lower Two Log Creek in Big River)
Big River Forest highest summer stream temperature Mean Weekly Average temperature	71 (Mainstream Big River at western property line)	71 (Mainstream Big River at western property line)	68 (Mainstream Big River at western property line)
Environmental Monitoring & Assessment Program reaches monitored per year on the Garcia River Forest by The Nature Conservancy and the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (65 total reaches established)	3	6	2
Forest Economics			
Estimated local economic contribution (employment, contractors, purchases)	\$3.6 million	\$3 million	\$3.7 million
Volume of logs removed (net board feet)	3,466,930	1,879,230	3,381,430
Number of log trucks	829	434	786
Verified forest carbon offsets	120,607	325,383	Verification still in progress
Miles driven by an average passenger car that are equal to above forest carbon offsets	295,605,392	797,507,353	Verification in progress
Community Outreach			
Number of participants in the Pedestrian and Equestrian Stewardship Access Program on Salmon Creek, Big River	18	15	12
Public tours	5	10	7

Project Orientation

At The Conservation Fund, we believe that well-managed forests can be both economically viable and ecologically sustainable. On California's North Coast, we continue to refine and demonstrate our pioneering approach to forest conservation, balancing environmental restoration and stewardship with the economic imperatives of large-scale forest ownership and the desire to sustain the local timber economy. Since 2004, with the help of our public and private partners, we have protected more than 120,000 acres of forestland as part of our North Coast Forest Conservation Initiative. Of these protected forests, we own and manage more than 74,000 acres in Mendocino and Sonoma counties. We aim to demonstrate that large, understocked tracts of coastal forest can be returned to ecological and economic viability through patient, adaptive management by a nonprofit organization, in partnership with private and public entities and community stakeholders. We are making conservation work for America.

We invite you to learn more about the major accomplishments, challenges and activities of our program in 2017. Our success depends on the strong support of a diverse set of partners—neighbors, local businesses, government agencies and conservation groups. None of this would be possible without you—thank you for your interest and continued support!

Habitat Restoration

The placement of large wood in streams and upgrading our 500-plus miles of road infrastructure to reduce road-related sediment delivery to streams is a high priority for salmon habitat restoration. Maintaining roads also is critical for traveling through the forests for log hauling, stream restoration projects, botanical surveys and northern spotted owl surveys. A significant portion of the money we make through timber and carbon sales is reinvested in road infrastructure improvements. These projects are part of the decade long process of improving our forest legacy roads, many of which predate modern standards.



One example of these important road projects is the Mainstem Garcia Sediment Reduction and Habitat Enhancement Project on the Garcia River Forest, which was implemented with cost-share funding from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). The project was completed in 2017 with the treatment of 7.23 miles of road in total, preventing 15,645 cubic yards of sediment from entering Garcia River tributaries—the equivalent of 1,500 dump trucks of dirt! The project included construction of two large woody debris (LWD) habitat enhancement structures, which already are improving stream conditions.

Similarly, the Graphite Creek Sediment Reduction and Habitat Enhancement Project on the Garcia River Forest—also using CDFW cost-share funding—was completed in 2017 with road upgrading and decommissioning at 33 sites totaling 7.1 miles of roadway. The project prevented 7,925 cubic yards of road-related sediment from entering watercourses and included the construction of six LWD habitat enhancement structures.

In 2017, upgrading approximately 10 miles of road through the Garcia River and Big River forests prevented 10,019 cubic yards of sediment from entering waterways.

The CDFW-funded Buckeye Forest sediment source assessment report is now complete. This critical first step, while time-consuming, ensures we have a prioritized action plan for erosion prevention and habitat restoration on 43.5 miles of forest roads and can efficiently and completely restore Coho and steelhead habitat.

Timber Harvests



The total volume of sustainably harvested trees in 2017 was 3,139,700 net board feet from the Big River and Garcia River forests. This volume is slightly below our Allowable Annual Cut, as determined in our management plans and Option A Sustained Yield Plan. All redwood and Douglas fir logs were harvested by local logging companies and sold to sawmills in Mendocino and Sonoma counties. Our forest conservation would not be possible without a healthy forest industry; we thank the local sawmills, logging contractors and resource professionals who help make our program successful.

Forest Certification



As they have every fall since 2007, third-party verifiers completed a field audit of the North Coast Forest Conservation Initiative to the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®-C001535) and Sustainable Forestry Initiative® (SFI®) standards. This project, as well as our other forests around the country, were found in overall conformance with the standards—the two most strict and comprehensive standards for forest management available. The Fund actively participates in the California SFI Implementation Committee, and we welcome comments and suggestions regarding our forest certification. Full audit reports are available on our website: www.conservationfund.org/projects/north-coast-forest-conservation-initiative/north-coast-reference-documents.

Climate Action



Forest conservation is an important tool in the fight against climate change. Redwood forests store more carbon per acre than any other forest type. Our forests were among the first and largest to receive verification as a source of greenhouse gas reductions under the protocols of the Climate Action Reserve. The Fund has transitioned our projects to the California Air Resources Board (ARB) Cap-and-Trade Program—a key element of California’s climate plan that allows regulated entities to use allowances or offsets to meet a portion of their emission reduction obligations. The carbon revenue combined with timber harvest revenue allows us to let the trees grow while we restore water quality through sediment reduction projects and instream habitat improvement. Our carbon projects comply with state protocols and are certified through ARB-approved third-party verifiers to ensure that the carbon offset credits are real, verifiable and permanent. In 2017, 325,383 offset credits were issued for 2016 vintages for all four projects, and annual verifications will continue for the foreseeable future.



Public Access Program

2017 was another successful year for our permit-based pedestrian access program in the Big River and Salmon Creek forests, as well as our equestrian program on the Salmon Creek Forest. These programs were launched in 2007 to provide access, cultivate stewardship and increase surveillance on the forests. Participants sign a pedestrian or equestrian permit to hike or ride for free on logging roads in the forests. In Big River, the Fund provides access to local community members to harvest firewood for home use. Since 2012 we have allowed limited permitted hunting for Mendocino County residents on land in the Garcia River Forest. In addition, multiple tours of all forests to review harvests and restoration projects are offered throughout the year. We are currently evaluating the potential for providing public access to Buckeye Forest. Please contact hnewberger@conservationfund.org to sign up for any of these public access opportunities.



Management Planning

The 10-year update of the Garcia Forest Integrated Resource Management Plan was approved by the conservation easement holder, The Nature Conservancy, and major funder, the State Coastal Conservancy. The purpose of our forestwide plans is to ensure a consistent framework for the sustainable management of each forest. Management plans are updated regularly and are available at www.conservationfund.org/projects/north-coast-forest-conservation-initiative/north-coast-reference-documents.

Spotlight

By *Olivia Fiori, Forest Technician*



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My favorite time of year on the North Coast forests is owl-calling season. Every spring and summer field technicians such as myself go out into the woods in the middle of the night on an ATV to look for these cute brown-feathered birds: the northern spotted owl. Due to intensive logging in the past and the subsequent loss of much of their habitat, these owls were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act almost 30 years ago. As their habitat declined, so did the population of this iconic species. All five of our properties have northern spotted owls. Their overall range extends as far north as southwestern British Columbia and as far south as the San Francisco Bay area.



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Once spotted owls choose a mate, they usually remain in a monogamous pair for the rest of their lives. For feeding, mating, reproduction, caring for their young, claiming their territory and general communication, the owls rely on vocalizations. The owls will use a variety of hoots, barks and whistles to communicate. As surveyors, we rely greatly on their responses to our prerecorded calls in order to locate them. It is essential that we find their locations through surveys so that we can carry out our timber harvest plans and restoration, and even improve some habitat for them, without causing these animals harm. When we survey for these owls, they usually respond. That is, unless a barred owl is present in the area.

Barred owls are a non-native species, have been genetically separate from the spotted owl for over 5 million years, and are originally from the East Coast. With the barred owl's territorial nature and advantage in size, the smaller spotted owls are not only vocalizing less (to avoid any possible confrontation), but the barred owls are also taking over what little habitat remains for the spotted owl. It's becoming increasingly difficult for us to locate these owls because they are reluctant to vocalize, which is very problematic for an owl that was already facing extinction.

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Bill Heil, Salmon Creek Project Team

John Hooper, Oz Farm

Alan Levine, Coast Action Group

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Linda Perkins, Salmon Creek Project Team

Chris Poehlmann, Friends of the Gualala River



Contact Us

Please see our website for more information on the North Coast Forest Conservation Initiative:
conservationfund.org

Detailed monitoring reports are also available by topic from our office in Caspar, CA:
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