

Train trip provides glimpse of threatened redwoods

By JUSTINE FREDERIKSEN The Daily Journal

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Visitors tour Noyo River Redwoods property as group is poised to save more than 100 acres of old-growth forest

Just a few yards from the Skunk Train tracks that snake their way through the Noyo River Redwoods, there's two huge redwoods with ominous blue and green lines around their trunks.

"Those are trees that were slated to be cut down," said Suzanne Moss, director of development for the Save the Redwoods League, a San Francisco-based organization dedicated to saving "ancient redwood forests and redwood ecosystems."

Moss and other representatives from the league showed the two "doomed" trees and many more to a group of visitors Saturday who rode the train six miles to see those redwoods and others on a 426-acre plot the league is hoping to buy from the Willits Redwood Company (WRC).

Chris Baldo, co-owner of WRC, said his company bought the property in 2006 and planned to log it.

"We did a harvest plan and were getting ready to log it when we were approached by the league," Baldo said, explaining that the company agreed to give the group a year to raise the \$7 million pricetag.

That deadline -- April 1 -- is rapidly approaching, but League Executive Director Ruskin Hartley said Monday the group is within \$34,000 of its goal of

raising \$7.5 million. The cost of "stewardship, management and project costs" are expected to total \$500,000.

The league said it is only raising \$3.5 million from league members and the public, and the remainder it is seeking from

public funds.

The league learned about the property through a group of Mendocino County residents who had reportedly wanted to "protect the land for decades" because of the redwoods located there and its proximity to the Noyo River headwaters.

According to the League, after the WRC received a Timber Harvest Plan permit in 2009 from CalFire, three environmental groups and two citizens filed a notice that they would appeal the permit. After months of discussions, the league said WRC agreed in April of 2010 not to harvest for one year while a conservation group was identified, and last July the league agreed to purchase the property.

If the money is raised and the land purchased, the League said it plans to "create a land preservation agreement and eventually transfer the acreage to a local land trust, a permanent steward."

The League said it also plans to restore the property's forest and river habitat, describing the trees as "bird magnets" that provide habitat for Northern Spotted Owls, Peregrine Falcons and many other birds, as well as bats and other species.

According to the league, the property has 123 acres of old-growth redwood and Douglas-fir forest, which represents "30 percent of all remaining old-growth forest in the Noyo River watershed."

Hartley said when the property is purchased, it will

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be the culmination of "decades of work by people focused on protecting" the trees, which he described as "increasingly rare treasures."

To donate money for the purchase of the Noyo River Redwoods, call 888-836-0005, or visit www.savetheredwoods.org/Noyo.

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