

Redwood National Park Expansion, Woodstock, Earth Day, and the Kent State Massacre

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The campaign to establish Redwood National Park in 1968 has been documented in books, oral histories, and film. To an extent, the divisive story of correcting the ecological problems created by that park's enabling legislation, through the passage of the Redwoods Expansion Act of 1978, has been told as well. However, some who were part of that effort think the story is incomplete. This paper will illustrate how a community of local conservation leaders, a dedicated college professor, and a number of students and residents pushed back against the forces of local economics and national politics to force the "fixing" of that redwood problem.

This paper examines the untold story of a broad-based citizen effort to expand Redwood National Park by 48,000 acres, and the role played by informed citizens who were the product of a mélange of contemporary social activist issues, and the leadership of many people, including Humboldt State University Natural Resources professor, Rudi Becking. Finally, this paper will look for possible extrapolations to current conservation efforts.

Background

A 1964 expedition chronicled by the National Geographic Society documented and publicized the discovery of the "Tallest Tree in the World" that grew on an alluvial flat on Redwood Creek, dubbed the "Tall Trees Grove."

The inclusion of the Tall Trees Grove, in the narrow boundary appendage along Redwood Creek in the 1968 congressional bill creating Redwood National Park, was recognized as a form of gerrymandering that flew in the face of local ecological, geological, and meteorological factors. The 1968 park legislation intended to spare Tall Trees Grove, but the trees would be doomed nonetheless (Figure 1).

Humboldt State University students

Humboldt became known as the "environmental school" in the 1960s and 70s with the number

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Figure 1. Redwood National Park historic boundaries showing the original 1968 boundary and the narrow Redwood Creek “appendage” and later 1978 boundary including more of Redwood Creek Watershed (source: Redwood National Park, James O’Barr).

of graduates in Natural Resources rising from 2 in 1966 to 44 in 1970; more than a 200% increase while at the same time, forestry increased initially but experienced a slight decline late in the decade in spite of a dramatic 30% increase in overall enrollment (Figures 2 and 3).

This change from traditional forestry to education in broader environmental conservation and natural resource agency administration was reflected in the student population. In the early 1970s, students at Humboldt had dramatically changed from the traditional foresters of the 1950s and 60s to “ecologists,” young people who had returned from Vietnam or had protested Vietnam. Humboldt students had seen their government take up arms against young people just like them, killing four and wounding nine more on campus at Kent State University. Students had seen colleagues taking up battles to clean up, and eventually stop ecological disasters, such as the oil spill in Santa Barbara in 1968. Students joined forces with Cesar Chavez and the United Grape Workers Union, and boycotted sales of grapes harvested by non-union labor. The bebop dance music and crooning of the 1950s and 1960s was drowned out by the heavy beat of Santana, Jimi Hendrix, and Janis Joplin, as well as the call-for-peace folk music of Joni Mitchell, Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, John Lennon, and Cat Stevens.

The United States struggled with the inequity of 18-year-olds who could be drafted into war and lose their lives, but who were not allowed to vote. On July 1, 1971, Congress adopted the twenty-sixth amendment to the U.S. Constitution, giving the right to vote to citizens 18 years and older, thus correcting what many considered a constitutional hypocrisy. As students returned to school in 1972, 6 of 10 candidates running for Arcata city council came from campus.

It was perhaps impossible to have predicted this new, energized generation would link with established conservation groups, local chapters of the Audubon Society, Sierra Club, as well as fishermen, mothers, fathers, and politicians to correct the Redwood Creek worm-shaped boundary problem, by expanding the park to include more of the watershed. Those connections among people of different generations and different backgrounds are the central point of this presentation.

Emerald Creek Committee

The Emerald Creek watershed was named through the efforts of redwoods local Sierra Club photographer, Dave Van de Mark. Van de Mark documented the iconic sweep of the “Emerald Mile”



Humboldt Overall Campus Annualized Enrollment

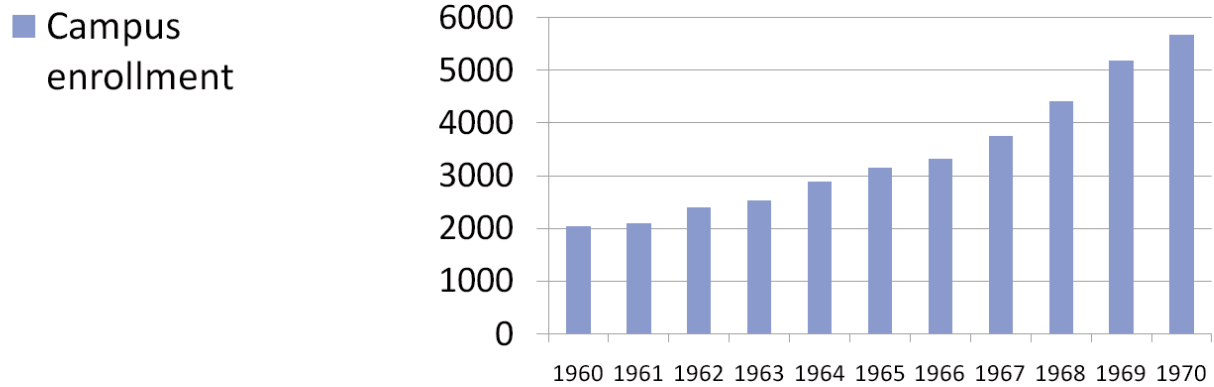


Figure 2. Annualized Humboldt enrollment from 1960–1970 showing increase in enrollment (source: www.calstate.edu/AS/abstract.shtml).

Students Graduating with BS or MS

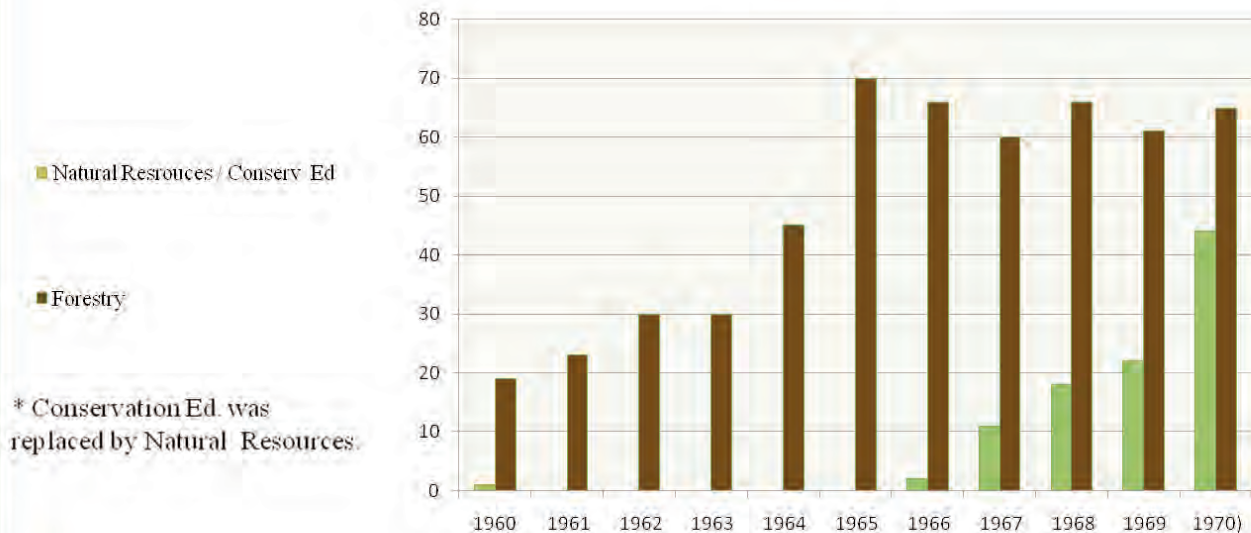


Figure 3. Comparison of graduates in Forestry vs. all other natural resource management programs from 1960–1970 (source: Ridenhour 2003).

redwood forest in the Redwood Creek Valley. In 1972, Humboldt Natural Resources professor Rudi Becking invited Howard King, a Save the Redwoods League photographer, to join him and students on a hike into Emerald Creek to see the trees and photograph them. This was the birth of the Emerald Creek Committee (ECC), whose purpose was to save the Tall Trees Grove, by including entire watersheds, such as Emerald Creek watershed.

Several organizations were active in protecting redwoods, but generally people were organized into loose systems of citizen-activist conservation work. Meanwhile, timber companies were emboldened and, perhaps, felt they had nothing to lose as they quickened their pace to clear-cut the few primeval forests left on steep, unstable slopes.

Documentation of the ecological destruction became an important task of local conservationists. This documentation became the story told to the general public nationwide through media contacts, as well as conservationists aligned with national organizations. Documentation required frequent hikes into the park and adjacent areas of private property where logging was progressing. Citizen activists defied trespass laws in order to give witness to the heavy loss and environmental destruction adjacent to the new park.

Congressional hearings led by Congressman Phil Burton in Eureka

In 1977, Congressman Phil Burton held hearings on the new congressional bill to expand park boundaries. Hearings sparked unprecedented community tension. Several survey respondents commented on this event.

ECC member John Amodio: “It was perhaps the most graphic and most extreme illustration of the type of fear that turns to anger and hatred that we experienced in that whole process, and it stunned me because I knew it was building a lot of emotions and they were rallying trying to whip the community into frenzy. They spat on the mayor of Arcata who spoke for the park.”

Sierra Club photographer, Dave Van de Mark: “When you have 5 goons standing around me with switchblades in their mouths and poking you in the chest saying, ‘We know where you live....’”

Local Sierra Club chapter president Lucille Vinyard who was subtly threatened with a knife recalled: “... it was the first time in my life I felt I was living in a near riot.... But we did our job.”

Long work, careful study of ecological resources, lead by professors nearby at Humboldt State, photographic and personal testimony that documented ecological loss, finally combined with strong public support and political will to “fix” the problems created by the 1968 legislation.

On May 27, 1978, President Jimmy Carter signed into law the Redwoods Expansion Act adding, overnight, 48,000 acres, more than doubling the size of Redwood National Park. Some of the most significant of these acres included Redwood Creek, and the entire Emerald Creek watershed.

Methods

Initial surveys. We targeted a group of current and former residents of Humboldt County, California, who were active in efforts to expand Redwood National Park during the years between the initial 1968 legislation that created Redwood National Park, and passage of the 1978 Redwood National Park Expansion Act. Surveys were sent via email to people who participated in the movement to Expand Redwood National Park who known by the authors through their actions and correspondence during the campaign to expand Redwood National Park. Surveys included requests to forward the survey to others who were involved in the activities to expand Redwood National Park in the 1970s. Respondents ranged from those who had limited involvement, to those who dedicated a majority of their time either for a few years or several decades. The initial survey generated 24 responses.

Phone interviews. We conducted four follow-up phone interviews with people who had been central to the effort. Two of these were active before 1968, and continued through 1978 and beyond. Two others came later, especially those worked with Emerald Creek Committee, and were active for a few years to a more than a decade.

Findings

Earth Day. The First Earth Day in 1970 was an environmental “teach-in that promoted grass-roots events inspired by the oil spill that left over 4 million gallons of oil in the water and on the beaches of southern California killing over 3,500 birds and over 100 seals and sea lions” (survey respondent). The survey shows that over 93% of ECC members responding to the survey participated in Earth Day, 1970.

Anti-war activities. Another strong correlation was found between all respondents, who participated in anti-war movement at the time. The Anti-war movement was so pronounced in the survey respondents there was not a difference statistically in those who were members of ECC and the general respondents. The survey illustrated that almost all respondents were also involved in anti-war activities; twenty-one of twenty-four respondents indicated this type of activity.

Participation in other social and civil rights issues. Similarly, 87% of all respondents and 80% of ECC members were involved broadly in social movements of the time including feminist, civil rights, and gay rights.

Youth music concerts. Many students arriving at Humboldt in the early 1970s had participated in a wide variety of large youth-centered, music concerts that gained popularity after the phenomenon of Woodstock. This activism and spirit translated to positive ability in working to protect redwoods. However, this response was less significant, statistically. Only about 50% of all respondents attended large youth concerts, with a slightly larger proportion (60%) of the ECC members subset indicating they attended these concerts.

What lessons can we learn?

1. Inspiration for social and anti-war peace issues, for example, can translate to environmental concern. Common narrative responses on survey forms included references to a variety of contemporary movements including, anti-war, American Indian Movement (AIM), no war taxes, native plant society, stopping the Gasque-Orleans Road through wilderness, feminist, union farm worker support, recycling, as well as founding the Northcoast Environmental Center, and formation of a new chapter for Friends of the Earth.
2. Movements can be fed by legacy work by elders or leaders, and fed by new energy—college universities have been a breeding ground (source) for that support. One survey respondent explained, “I think the outgrowth from ECC was merely our vision of that radical arm (of conservation.) Reaching out and grabbing onto something rather than what I felt as old guard which was OK sometimes with treading water. If they had not been there, before us, though, we would never have been there.”
3. Citizen activism fed by a belief in right and wrong can withstand, and perhaps be strengthened by, threats. Participants in both written surveys and phone interviews indicated their anger was not directed toward the frontline loggers who had little ability to change logging plans. Participants instead blamed logging company corporate heads, stockholders and, to an extent, the National Park Service for the magnitude of the logging destruction. But participants were clear on their personal inspiration and dedication.
4. Political solutions must be fed by groundswell and personal experience. Personal testimony cannot be easily compromised by challenges motivated by political pragmatism, money

and political gain. Pragmatism is for the politicians and bureaucrats—effective conservation requires unapologetic activism. It is somewhat remarkable how some people withstood decades of scorn in small, sometimes tiny communities, where there is no way to hide, in order to promote the “better good.” Local activists and national conservation leaders withstood personal threats in order to be heard.

5. Well positioned data, images, and testimony, fed by constant prodding, and even civil disobedience, can keep a spotlight on an otherwise transitory concern. Repeatedly, the surveys and interviews, as well as reference materials (e.g., Schrepfer 1983) spoke of the importance of the on-the-ground witness to, and documentation of, what was really going on behind what locals refer to as the “Redwood Curtain.” Timber companies were willing to mischaracterize, or lie about, the impacts of their activities. Activists, including old guard conservationists, were willing to engage in civil disobedience to save what they considered to be an important ecological, and sometimes spiritual, resource. Van de Mar’s photos, Janda’s soil surveys, even National Geographic’s articles, made it difficult, if not impossible, for the public and politicians to look the other way.
6. First-hand, personal experience provides strong nourishment for continued dedication to a long struggle. Local activists could readily see the destructive forces of logging near RNP. They could photograph it, pay witness to it, and take others to see it. Truth can be seen and cannot be denied by opportunists or liars.
7. It is important to recognize inspirational role models—not charismatic, but inspirational—for powering future conservation.
8. Rudi Becking was such a role model, but it is important to recognize the inherent human failures of any individual whether legislator, professor, activist or student.
9. Perhaps this current generation is ripe for that translation and spreading their firsthand experience through social media to fire up activism.

People today are not without interest in outdoor experiences. Visits to Redwood National and State Parks have grown from 34,000 in 1971 to 481,000 in 2010 and a high of 677,000 in 1988. Backcountry camping, on the other hand, service-wide, has dropped from 2,397,098 in 1979 to 1,763,541 in 2010 in spite of increased opportunities for that experience (NPS public statistics page, www.nature.nps.gov/stats/index.cfm).

How do we move beyond or incorporate the new networking technology to provide first-hand experience in testimony? We can look at a recent local example in Louisiana where contemporary conservation activists might be thwarted in giving that testimony. The recent British Petroleum (BP) oil spill affected a large swath of the Gulf Coast. Unlike volunteer activist witnesses to redwood logging, employees paid by the responsible party (BP) for clean-up work may be contractually denied the ability to write or speak about what they witnessed while cleaning oiled beaches, birds and marine mammals. Similarly, news media indicated some researchers interested in using this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity have been told by BP they must wait years before publishing their work. If Rudi Becking or Emerald Creek Committee had been paid for their work in return for silence, how could they have been successful?

An informed first-hand experience can translate to activism and commitment, however that commitment is best expressed.

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