

New access to largest and oldest redwoods

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For the first time, visitors to the Redwood National and State Parks will have official, low-impact access to the famed Grove of Titans to see some of the world’s largest and oldest coast redwoods.

Located on Howland Hill Road, between the Boy Scout Trail and Stout Grove, the Grove of Titans is a “premier example of an extraordinary old-growth redwood forest” according to Erin Gates, deputy superintendent, RNSP and North Coast Redwoods District, California State Parks. The Grove of the Titans was experiencing “significant damage from visitors walking ‘off trail’ to access this area,” she said.

“This project is really a story about legacy: being mindful of the role we all play in helping to keep our parks thriving. Through powerful partnerships, we have been able to create an opportunity for visitors to experience the beauty and awe of this grove in a way that also helps protect this sensitive and delicate habitat into the future,” Superintendent Gates said.

New Visitor Experience

The new elevated boardwalk through the Grove of Titans also features interpretive signage and exhibits, complete with redwood forest illustrations and hands-on features to educate visitors about the habitat and safe trail use. Interpretation was developed in consultation with the Tolowa Dee-ni’ Nation to illuminate the Indigenous history of the area and present-day relationships that Tolowa people have sustained with these lands for generations.

The Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation collaborated on the Grove of Titans Trail Project. The Tribal Council stated that "Tolowa Dee-ni' maintains our responsibility as the original stewards of the Grove of Titans through a government-to-government relationship with the Redwood National and State Parks. With the completion of this project, we are grateful park visitors will be able to more responsibly visit our ancestral territory and magnificent redwood relatives."

New services and amenities have been added nearby along Howland Hill Road, including ADA-accessible parking and restrooms.

In total, trail crews spent more than 23,000 hours to realign the three-mile Mill Creek Trail and build the new elevated walkway. To minimize construction impact on the sensitive habitat, the crews also hand-carried close to 128 tons of construction materials and tools to the site. They removed old, unofficial social trails and restored previously damaged and degraded areas by replanting ferns and other understory plants.

"Balance is key when planning and building a trail in such a rare and beautiful ecosystem," said Jessica Carter, director of parks and public engagement for Save the Redwoods League. "With the realigned trail, new boardwalk and signage, we're respecting the natural grandeur of this special place while also welcoming all visitors to experience and enjoy Grove of Titans for generations to come."

New Titaneers Volunteer Program to Care for the Grove

Redwood National and State Parks is actively recruiting volunteers to monitor the trails and interact with park visitors to support the long-term care of the Grove of Titans and nearby trails. Contact JedSmithTitans@gmail.com to learn more about the new Titaneers volunteer program and to get involved.

"The Grove of Titans project shows how we can – and must – work together to accomplish great things," said Scott Larson, executive director of Redwood Parks Conservancy. "It starts with generous giving through organizations like Redwood Parks Conservancy. But the work is not done. We need to teach existing visitors and do a better job reaching out to include new communities, to understand why this project happened and how they can help by treading on places like this more gently to truly 'leave no trace'."

Funding the Grove of Titans Trail

The cost of the Mill Creek Trail realignment, Grove of Titans boardwalk, associated new visitor amenities and grove restoration was approximately \$4 million.

Save the Redwoods League supporters contributed more than \$2 million toward the project, including a generous challenge grant from Josie Merck of Connecticut and the Merck Family Foundation.

Ms. Merck first became aware of the danger facing the Grove of the Titans while reading a newspaper article during a visit to the Bay Area in 2017. The need for action to save the giant redwoods was so compelling that

Ms. Merck mobilized her family foundation to offer a matching fund grant to get the trail project off the ground.

The project was also supported by \$875,000 from California Natural Resources Agency through the Prop 68 Parks, Environment, and Water Bond Act of 2018; more than \$900,000 of in-kind contributions from the project partners; and \$205,000 from Redwood Parks Conservancy donors.

About Grove of Titans

The Grove of Titans is within Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation ancestral territories. It is also part of Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park within Redwood National and State Parks (RNSP) in Del Norte County. RNSP is internationally recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site because it protects a significant population of coast redwoods, the world's tallest living things and among the most impressive trees in the world.

Social media and unofficial promotion of the grove's off-trail location led to a dramatic increase in visitation over the last 20 years. With no official trails or visitor infrastructure, the influx of people threatened the health of the grove.

A complex web of unplanned social trails formed over the years. This brought meandering foot traffic directly through the grove, which destroyed understory plants and damaged the trees' shallow root systems. Hiking through the sensitive ecosystem also pushed eroded soil and litter into the streams, impacting coho and steelhead spawning habitat. Visitors often left waste behind.

In 2018, California State Parks, Save the Redwoods League, Redwood Parks Conservancy and the National Park Service unveiled their collaborative plan to safeguard the famed old-growth grove and establish formalized, inspirational visitor access.

The realigned Mill Creek Trail and elevated walkway through the Grove of Titans were designed to limit the impact of visitation to the grove while providing official, ecologically sensitive public access.

"The Grove of Titans boardwalk is bound to become one of the signature trails within Redwood National and State Parks", said Steve Mietz, superintendent of RNSP, National Park Service. "The unique design of the walkway provides an aesthetically pleasing, intimate connection between visitors and redwoods while protecting the giant redwoods of what is now known as the Grove of Titans."

Recreate Responsibly

California State Parks reminds visitors to recreate responsibly with COVID-19 still present. Prior to leaving home, visitors are asked to check the status of the park units they want to visit to find out what restrictions and guidelines are in place. Having a back-up plan in case their destination is crowded is recommended. For additional guidelines and safety tips, please visit parks.ca.gov/COVID19.

Learn more about the Grove of Titans project at [SaveTheRedwoods.org/GOT](https://www.savetheredwoods.org/GOT).