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## Crews set to build first public trails at San Vicente Redwoods

Ten years in the making, could open to visitors as soon as fall



In the wake of the 2020 August CZU Lightning Complex fire, crews have been rehabilitating San Vicente Redwoods, which suffered immense fire damage. (Contributed photo – Matt Dolkas)



DAVENPORT – Nonprofit partners are inching closer to opening the first public trail system in the San Vicente Redwoods – some 9,000 acres of forest that nearly touches Bonny Doon and stretches to the Davenport coast.

Crews are scheduled to begin building out 8.5 miles of trail in April, which could become the first segment of a new sky to sea trail system dubbed the “ridgeline to shoreline.” Horseback riders, mountain bikers and hikers could take to trails as soon as fall.

Bay Area based Sempervirens Fund and Peninsula Open Space Trust own San Vicente, which was a logging and mining hub for nearly a century. Land Trust of Santa Cruz County manages public access and conservation work at the forest with Save the Redwoods League. The groups began [revitalizing the land in 2011](#), alongside the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band.



Jim Robins, biologist and principal with Alnus Ecological, stands in Mill Creek. In October a 100-year old dam was removed to allow waters to run free and coho salmon to reestablish. (Santa Cruz Sentinel — Hannah Hagemann)



The 2020 CZU August Lightning Complex fire moved through nearly every part of San Vicente. Trees and plant communities were severely burned in some parts of the forest, where other areas saw ecological benefits from lower intensity flames. But forest areas already approved for public access in San Vicente were among the hardest hit, Newkirk said.

Across the Santa Cruz Mountains, thousands of trees burned in the historic blaze. While Douglas firs suffered the most damage, some redwoods also burned out. But many trees are resprouting, alongside rare fire-following plants popping up.

“I think that it’s a story not only of devastation but restoration and rebirth,” Newkirk said.

Before trail construction begins, 1,000 scorched trees that otherwise could be a danger to recreators will be felled. The undertaking includes ferrying helicopters into the forest to remove the trees – known as heli-logging – a step Newkirk said the organizations are taking to [protect sensitive watershed habitat](#).

The conservation groups are also working to make San Vicente more resilient to future wildfires by reestablishing and strengthening fuel breaks – strategic areas of thinned forest that can prevent the spread of wildfire.



A California newt strolls along the forest floor in the San Vicente Redwoods. (Contributed photo — Ian Rowbotham)



Building the envisioned 38-mile trail system could take three to five years, which includes a possible connection to the [soon-to-be opened Cotoni-Coast Dairies](#) unit of the California Coastal National Monument. Santa Cruz Mountains Trail Stewardship crews, who also worked on [reconstructing the Fall Creek Unit of Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park](#) post-CZU Complex, are leading the trail build out.

“Eventually, we’re going to be able to just have this world-class network from ridgeline to shoreline, that will bring in trail users of all types,” Newkirk said.

To complete the ridgeline to shoreline project more funding is needed, according to Newkirk. But opening up a first section of park to recreators will serve as a pilot.

Over the decade since San Vicente became conservation lands endangered species [such as the marbled murrelet](#) have also made home in the forest. San Vicente is a haven amongst more populated adjacent wooded areas, said Susan Petrie, a senior Stewardship Project manager at Peninsula Open.

“We’ve had this thoughtful management of the property for 10 years and the wildlife has responded and is using the area even after the fire,” Petrie said.

As the forest is opened up to the public, prioritizing stewardship will remain critical Petrie said.

“It’s a deliberate process — we don’t want to rush things. We want to make sure we’re getting all the right information, collecting the right data, involving the right experts,” Petrie said. “This is a science led process.”

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