



I ♥ REDWOODS

This may come as a shock to Earth First!. I may have single-handedly done more to save redwoods from their supposed North Coast demise than Julia “Butterfly” Hill. And I didn’t have to spend two years sitting in one.

I don’t quite know when or where I began my obsession with the redwood tree. Perhaps it was the first time I crossed the Golden Gate Bridge and passed through the Waldo Tunnel on my way north, leading me to my first views of Mt. Tamalpais and Mill Valley. I vividly remember the first time I walked among the giant fog shrouded trees of Muir Woods. It was truly inspirational.

Then again, maybe it was the time I got stuck in a wicked late spring snowstorm in Sequoia National Park, forced to bivouac in Tharp’s Log, a fallen giant sequoia that was an early pioneer’s home. I thought, how lucky I was to wait out the storm inside this hollowed-out land version of a gray whale.

I’ve spent a great deal of time photographing Northern California’s forests from the air, and even more time walking through the public and private forests of Northern California. I’ve been privileged to tour the vast timber forests of Mendocino County, generally in the company of registered foresters, but also in the company of wild-eyed alarmists, for whom every cut tree moves us one step closer to global warming and the end of life as we know it.

The scars left behind by clear- and over-cutting are not to be taken lightly. The rivers and streams of the North Coast have been silted due to a cut-and-run mentality, most certainly contributing to the demise of the salmon runs.

I’ve seen, though, how redwoods can be farmed in a sustainable manner. The basic premise of a sustainable tree harvest is to plant more trees than you cut. Unfortunately, this has not been done on any grand scale in California. It’s not as though redwoods are difficult trees to grow. They require many years and a lot of water to mature. But I digress.

Upon a move to Healdsburg in 1999, and after surveying my new property, situated adjacent to the Redwood Highway, it seemed only fitting that this was the perfect place to begin a redwood forest. There were already a handful of 60-foot redwoods on or near my property. The previous owner seemed also to be enthralled with redwoods, although it appears he had a



tough go of it, by the appearance of some struggling redwoods he planted in packed clay flatlands and rocky hillside soil.

After two years, I'm proud to call myself a steward of the land. A relatively simple task of lining my acre-and-one-half with redwoods of all sizes and species has turned me into an environmentalist. (Simple, that is, if you consider "simple" to be the hundreds of hours I have invested so far in digging holes, bringing in truck-loads of soil amendments, buying and planting trees, and designing and installing an extensive labyrinth of water lines and drip irrigation systems, all to support my "habit.")

There are now over 140 redwoods in the ground (including the aforementioned strugglers that I have since nursed back to a robust state of health), with more to come. Most of the trees on my property are the locally familiar coastal redwoods, *Sequoia sempervirens*. Two types — Aptos Blue and Soquel—grow well in the warmer inland areas. On a whim, during the holidays, I purchased a *Sequoiadenron giganteum*, also known as a giant sequoia, because it was the perfect shape for a Christmas tree. It's now in the ground and doing just fine, though I have to be careful not to over-water. Giant sequoias don't like as much water as coastal redwoods.

The jewels in my collection are a couple of dawn redwoods (*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*). Indigenous to China, this species was first brought to the United States in the 1940s from the Szechuan Province. I nearly had a heart attack when my dawn redwoods dropped their needles that first autumn, until I did some research and learned that this unusual tree is deciduous.

As my hobby grows (no pun intended), I've come to understand that these trees are special, but not endangered. I've also learned that redwoods don't really demand heavy fogs to exist and seem to grow robustly outside of the coastal fog belt. The coastal redwoods of California exist along a narrow band of land that extends from southern Monterey County to the Chetco River in the southwest corner of Oregon. There are approximately 1,740,000 acres of coastal redwood forests in California and Oregon. In California, there are 260,000 acres of redwoods located within state and national park boundaries. Though most of the original old growth trees have been cut, there is hope for future generations.



My wife, concerned for my mental and physical well being, is worried that in my mad rush to plant so many redwoods, I might be attacked by eco-terrorists for creating an agri-monoculture. I think I'll plant a few grapes just to break things up.

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