



Big Basin Redwoods State Park: A "Seed Bank" for Forward-Thinking Conservation & Management



California Department of Parks and Recreation

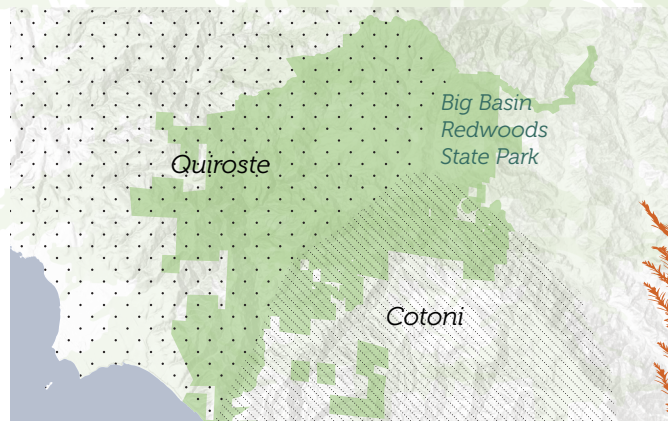
The relationships between the land that today is known as Big Basin Redwoods State Park (Big Basin) and its inhabitants, caretakers and visitors have left imprints on the land and our cultures. While the stories of Big Basin are unique, the trajectory of changing relationships

between human culture and the landscape reflects a much broader history. Experiences and events that have shaped Big Basin are important to remember, as both may inspire and inform resilient land management practices for Big Basin and other lands in California and beyond.

COTONI AND QUIROSTE LANDS

The Cotoni and Quiroste, members of the Ohlone culture in the Bay Area, traditionally inhabited the lands that became Big Basin. The tribes used fire and other land management practices to promote forest health and the growth of useful vegetation. Strategies included using lower intensity fire in controlled patterns within various plant communities during their respective seasons to enhance food, medicinal and material resources.

Burning of conifer forests, whether natural or human-induced, is known to have helped with the proliferation of species that depend on or benefit from fire. Vegetation such as ferns, horsetail, and sedge that emerged after the fires were used for weaving and basketry. Recent research has also suggested controlled burning was used by the Quiroste as a tool for maintaining grasslands, reducing encroachment by trees and shrubs, and enhancing browse for the game animals they hunted.¹



BIRTHPLACE OF THE CONSERVATION MOVEMENT



Sempervirens Club with the famous Father of the Forest Tree, 1901.

Established in 1902, Big Basin Redwoods State Park is the oldest state park in California. At the end of the 19th century, citizens concerned with the destruction of redwood forests and the loss of biodiversity campaigned to set aside the lands for permanent preservation. The group of activists formed the Sempervirens Club to formally promote their movement, lobby the State, and build public support. Their efforts quickly led to the passage of the

California Redwood Park Law in 1901, followed a year later by the State's purchase of California Redwood Park (later renamed Big Basin Redwoods State Historic Park). Upon opening, the park entrance gates declared the forest "to be preserved in a state of nature."

California Redwood Park (later renamed Big Basin) was one of the first public commitments to environmental preservation and outdoor recreation.

¹Bay Nature; <https://baynature.org/article/rekindling-old-ways/>

Approximate territory of the Quiroste and Cotoni.

INDIGENOUS MANAGEMENT

10,000 years ago

Quiroste & Cotoni tribes inhabit land, periodically set fires as part of land management practices

1769

Santa Cruz redwood forests recorded by Spanish explorer

A PARK ON FIRE

In 2020, 97% of Big Basin was burned by the CZU Lightning Complex Fire. The fire was particularly destructive due to high fuel loads resulting from a history of fire suppression, and drought conditions intensified by climate change. Nearly all historic buildings and structures were destroyed, including the visitor center, which was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps as part of the New Deal.



Charred redwoods in Big Basin in 2021. Nic Coury, Associated Press

PRESCRIBED BURNS IN PRACTICE

Over the past fifty years, California State Parks has worked with numerous partners to conduct prescribed burns as part of land management for park units throughout the state, including the redwood forests of Redwood National and State Parks, the giant sequoia groves at Calaveras Big Trees State Park, Big Basin, and many others.

In the Central Coast Region, the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and land management agencies are collaborating to reintroduce prescribed burns as a way to incorporate indigenous land management practices and help to restore California landscapes. As we continue to learn about California's landscape history, wildfire science and the impacts of climate change, it is becoming increasingly apparent that fire will play an important role in managing for more resilient landscapes.

A PIONEER FOR RESILIENT PARKS

Conservation leaders are reimagining Big Basin as a model for the next century of parks. Management that encourages natural resilience and stewardship that emphasizes the cultural significance of the park will position Big Basin to confront the climate-related challenges facing California. Management priorities are anticipated to include:



Reintroducing indigenous stewardship practices



Balancing protection of sensitive areas with public access



Prioritizing diverse stories and experiences



Collaborating with tribal leaders, conservation organizations, and scientists



At Pepperwood Preserve in Sonoma County, researchers test land management practices across various Mediterranean ecosystems to develop regional adaptation strategies, with an inter-tribal Native American advisory council advising on traditional management techniques.

