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## SAVE THE REDWOODS LEAGUE

# Conservation group's 'prize' — massive land of ancient giants

Nonprofit to pay \$15M for 530-acre privately owned sequoia forest

By Paul Rogers

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A Bay Area conservation group has signed a deal to purchase the world's largest privately owned giant sequoia forest, a primeval landscape in California's Southern Sierra Nevada with massive trees that soar 250 feet tall, span up to 80 feet around at their trunks and live for more than 2,000 years.

The 530-acre property, known as the Alder Creek, is roughly the same size as Muir Woods National Monument in Marin County. Located in Tulare County 10 miles south of Sequoia National Park, it is home to 483 trees that are larger than 6 feet in diameter — four more trees than the famed Mariposa Grove at Yosemite National Park.

"This is probably the most coveted sequoia conservation opportunity in a generation," said Sam Hodder, president of Save the Redwoods League, a nonprofit group based in San Francisco that has agreed to pay \$15.6 million to purchase the property.

"It's not any single tree," he said of the landscape, which eventually will be open to the public. "This is an alpine landscape covered with iconic, breathtaking, cinnamon-barked trees that are surrounded by pastures. It is such a superlative representation of nature. This is the prize. This is the best of what's left. It's a very special place."

The league, founded in 1918, signed a purchase agreement with the Rouch family, who has owned the land since the 1940s. The family's patriarch, Claud Albert, bought the land for its logging potential just before World War II, said his grandson, Mike Rouch, of Fresno.

"When they bought the property there was not even a road to it," he said. "They had to ride horses."

Over the generations, the family cut down sugar pine, **SEQUOIAS » PAGE 5**



VICTORIA REEDER — SAVE THE REDWOODS LEAGUE

The Alder Creek property in the Southern Sierra, 10 miles south of Sequoia National Park, is the world's largest privately owned giant sequoia forest, with 483 trees larger than 6 feet in diameter.

## MIDDLE EAST

# Trump points finger at Iran

President says U.S. military action not yet planned after attack on Saudi oil facilities

By Robert Burns

The Associated Press

**WASHINGTON** » President Donald Trump declared Monday that it "looks" like Iran was behind the explosive attack on Saudi Arabian oil facilities. But he stressed that military retaliation was not yet on the table in response to the strike against a key U.S. Mideast ally.

Oil prices soared worldwide amid the damage in Saudi Arabia and fresh Middle East war concerns. But Trump put the brakes on any talk of quick military action — earlier he said the U.S. was "locked and loaded" — and he said the oil impact would not be significant on the U.S., which is a net energy exporter.

The Saudi government called the attack an "unprecedented act of aggression and sabotage" but stopped short of directly pinning blame on Iran.

Iran denied involvement.

Trump, who has repeatedly stressed avoiding new Middle East wars, seemed intent on preserving room to maneuver in a crisis that Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had immediately called Iran's fault. Pompeo said Saturday, "Iran has now launched an unprecedented attack on the world's energy supply."

Trump, too, had talked more harshly at first. But by Monday afternoon, he seemed intent on consultations with allies.

"That was an attack on Saudi Arabia," he said.

"It wasn't an attack on us, but we would certainly help them," he said, noting a decadeslong alliance linked to U.S. oil dependence that has lessened in recent years. The U.S. has no treaty obligation to defend Saudi Arabia.

Trump said he was sending Pompeo to Saudi Arabia "to discuss what they feel" about the attack and an appropriate response.

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# Sequoias

FROM PAGE 1

white fir, red fir and other trees to make framing lumber for houses and other products. But they left the massive sequoias largely untouched.

"Less than a dozen were ever taken," Rouch said. "I'm 62, and there's never been one cut down in my lifetime. They could have gotten fence posts or roof shakes out of them. But I think my dad deep down recognized how beautiful they were and he didn't want to take them."

A cousin of the coast redwood, which is the world's tallest tree, giant sequoias are the largest living tree by volume, a prehistoric species that lives up to 3,000 years. Giant sequoias exist today only in 73 groves from the Tahoe National Forest to the Sequoia National Forest east of Bakersfield. Nearly all of the remaining groves are preserved on public land within Yosemite National Park, Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park, Calaveras Big Trees State Park and Sequoia National Forest.

Conservation groups have worked for generations to secure permanent protections, acre by acre, for each grove.

Last year, Save the Redwoods League spent \$3.3 million to buy the world's second-largest privately owned grove of ancient se-



quoias. Known as the Red Hill property, that 160-acre forest is about 8 miles south of the Alder Creek property. The league plans to transfer both parcels to the U.S. Forest Service over the next decade, so that they can be included in the Giant Sequoia National Monument, a part of Sequoia National Forest set aside for special protection in 2000 by President Bill Clinton.

Most of the land in the area is owned by the federal government.

The Alder Creek property, which is 5,800 to 7,800 feet in elevation, not far from Golden Trout Wilderness, is an unusual exception.

In the 1800s, to encourage settlement, Congress granted federal land to California and other states in the early West. The states could then sell that land to settlers.



MAX FORSTER — SAVE THE REDWOODS LEAGUE

The redwoods league plans to transfer the Alder Creek property to the U.S. Forest Service.

farmers, loggers, miners and others to raise money for the construction and financing of schools. So the parcels were called "school lands."

The practice led to a checkerboard ownership pattern in the Sierra and other rural areas.

Rouch said that over the years, his family has allowed friends and acquaintances to camp on the property, which has a network of trails and a few cabins. Early in its ownership, the family also allowed a rural development named Sequoia Crest to be constructed on about 100 acres.

Covered with deep snow

in the winter, the property is home to mountain lions, black bears, coyotes and abundant bird species.

Alder Creek forest is famous for the Stagg Tree, a 250-foot-tall giant named after Amos Alonzo Stagg (1862-1965), a pioneering football coach at the University of Chicago who retired to Stockton. The tree is believed to be the fifth-largest tree in the world by volume.

Hodder said his organization hopes to transfer the Red Hill property to the Forest Service in 2022. But the league will retain the Alder Creek property for up to 10 years. During that

time, scientists plan to draw up public access plans. They also will work with logging crews and government officials to thin out areas that have grown unnaturally thick after generations of fire suppression.

They will not cut down any ancient sequoias, Hodder said. Rather, workers will remove pine, fir and cedar trees in some places. Over the past 20 years, several big forest fires in the Sierra Nevada — including the Pier Fire in 2017 and the Rough Fire in 2015 — burned so hot that they killed several dozen giant sequoias.

Removing unnaturally

thick brush and trees, which the National Park Service regularly does at Mariposa Grove in Yosemite, reduces the risk of severe fires and increases the likelihood that when fires do start, they will burn more moderately along the forest floor, allowing the fire-resistant trees to survive.

"Our goal is to make sure the property is fire ready," Hodder said. "The age-old belief that no matter what you throw at giant sequoia, they are going to survive, we now know that's not the case anymore."

Rouch, who works as a building contractor, said five generations of his family have a history on the Alder Creek property. It is selling it now because, like many families, each generation has more heirs, which makes for complicated estate planning and succession.

He noted that he has never visited Yosemite National Park, a two-hour drive from his house.

"We have this property. I haven't needed to," he said.

But that all will probably change now. And Rouch said, he is glad the enormous sequoias he grew up with will be preserved so that future generations will enjoy them.

"We've used the land," he said. "But we have tried to take the best care of it that we can."

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