

CALIFORNIA TODAY

California Today: With a Little Help, Muir Woods Reclaims Its Land



Redwood trees in Muir Woods, Calif. | Credit Nick Bilton/The New York Times

By Thomas Fuller and Matt Stevens

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They paved paradise and put up a lot of parking lots. That was the way some national parks coped with the surge in visitors in recent decades. We published an [article](#) this week on a project that did the reverse — restored the Mariposa Grove of giant sequoias in Yosemite National Park partly by tearing up a lot of asphalt and hauling it away.

The Muir Woods National Monument, the grove of centuries-old coastal redwoods in Marin County, is undergoing a similar multimillion-dollar transformation, albeit more gradually. In January the park instituted a mandatory parking reservation system to mitigate overcrowding. A shuttle bus from other parking areas also requires reservations.

The result has been a 20 percent reduction in the number of visitors to Muir Woods, which is across the Golden Gate Bridge from San Francisco. Visitors numbered 72,790 in April this year compared with 92,589 during the same month last year, according to the Park Service.

Next summer the park will begin tearing up parking lots, relocating and renovating them, possibly using a more natural material than asphalt.

“At the end of the day that is the goal — a smaller footprint and more that is natural and vegetative,” said Mia Monroe, a community liaison ranger at Muir Woods who has helped lead the restoration. “We are trying to move all of our infrastructure out of sensitive areas.”

The park will relocate wastewater pipes, renovate paths and footbridges, help restore salmon populations in the Redwood Creek by removing boulders and replacing them with a more fish-friendly habitat.

A decade ago Muir Woods became the first national park to have a quiet zone. Visitors to the Cathedral Grove, home to the park’s oldest tree (around 750 years old), are asked to talk quietly (children included!) and to avoid using cellphones.

“This isn’t a wilderness area that is way off the beaten path. It’s so close to urban San Francisco,” Emily Burns, science director for the Save the Redwoods League, a century-old group that advocates for preserving redwood and sequoia forests. “But the Park Service is figuring out innovative ways to provide as close to a wilderness experience as you could get that close to an urban center.”

California Today is edited by Julie Bloom, who grew up in Los Angeles and graduated from U.C. Berkeley.