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North Fork Elk River Coho HELP Act Restoration Project, Press Release

Several government agencies, non-profit groups and employees of Humboldt Redwood Company (HRC) are working together on salmon habitat restoration projects in two North Coast California watersheds.

Elk River is an important Humboldt Bay tributary for steelhead, Coho, and Chinook salmon. Impacted in the 1990s by a series of storms culminating in the late '90's record setting El Niño event, the Elk River, located just south of Eureka, is the largest tributary to Humboldt Bay.

The North Fork Elk River project involved the strategic placement of large redwood logs at two locations near Camp Riggs Johnston Boy Scout Camp on the North Fork Elk River. The purpose of the project is to increase pool habitat through natural scour in and around the wood placements and to capture and sort gravels and sediment which increases spawning opportunities. The structures will also provide for salmon and steelhead refuge during peak winter flows and shelter through summer and fall months.

This particular project was completed using then State Assembly Member Jared Huffman's Coho HELP Act, a streamlined restoration permitting process passed into law in 2012. The Coho HELP Act expedites restoration activities beneficial to endangered Coho salmon.

Bob Pagliuco, Marine Habitat Resource Specialist with the NOAA Office of Habitat Conservation Restoration notes: *"The North Fork Elk River Project enhances 1,000 feet of critical habitat for multiple listed salmonids in the Elk River Watershed consistent with recommended actions in NOAA Recovery Plans. We look forward to continuing to partner with HRC on projects that will lead to the recovery of these public trust resources"*.

Recovery has been ongoing and in recent years Elk River has returned as a productive salmon spawning and nursery stream. The recently completed restoration project is anticipated to further enhance salmon habitat.

To the southeast of Elk River, critical off-channel winter habitat was constructed in Lawrence Creek, a tributary to Yager Creek which flows into the Van Duzen River. In addition to providing escape and holding opportunity for adult and juvenile fish during peak flows, the construction of a deep off-channel pool, enhanced with large wood, is also designed to provide cold water habitat during warm summer months for the benefit of juvenile steelhead and salmon.

Further south, nine large wood structures were placed in Bear Creek, a tributary to the lower Eel River near the town of Scotia. Like the North Fork Elk River project, Bear Creek also utilized the Coho HELP Act to coordinate project permitting requirements.

Andrea Poteet, Fish Habitat Specialist with the California Conservation Corps (CCC), had this to say about the Bear Creek project: *"The California Conservation Corps appreciates the opportunity to partner with Humboldt Redwood Company in their efforts to restore habitat in this important Coho and steelhead stream. Habitat complexity and cover for salmonids was improved in Bear Creek by the installation of nine large wood structures. CCC hand crews were able to place and anchor large wood in areas beyond the reach of heavy equipment in seven of these structures. Additional support to this project was provided by NOAA partnership funds. In partnership with the landowners, the CCC has been working to restore watershed health on these streams for over 20 years and we look forward to continuing this relationship that benefits both the environment and CCC members."*

All three projects were conducted in consultation with NOAA Fisheries, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), and the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (NCRWQCB). Implementation of the projects relied upon the combined field work of HRC heavy equipment operators and the CCC. Cost sharing by HRC and NOAA Fisheries contributed to these projects.

Nick Simpson, a senior environmental scientist with the CDFW, commented on all three private forestland projects: *“Instream restoration projects such as these, in conjunction with environmentally sound upslope management, can play a significant role in accelerating recovery of Coho salmon population in our local watersheds. We applaud these voluntary instream efforts and look forward to continuing in partnership with private landowners engaged in these types of enhancement and restoration activities”.*

HRC owns and manages approximately 209,000 acres of coastal redwood and Douglas-fir forest in Humboldt County for sustainable timber production and habitat conservation pursuant selective harvest forestry policies and a multi-species Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP).

About Humboldt Redwood Company

Humboldt Redwood Company (HRC) was created in 2008 from lands purchased in Humboldt County with the publicly declared mission to be good stewards of the forest and at the same time run a successful business. We have made significant progress in that regard:

- 1. Adopting policies to make HRCs forestlands Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®) certified;*
- 2. Adding more than 500 million board feet of redwood and Douglas fir trees to the forest by lowering the rate of harvest;*
- 3. Identifying and protecting old growth trees down to the individual tree across our property;*
- 4. Elimination of traditional clear cutting from our property;*
- 5. Long term investments to improve habitat for fish across the property by controlling or preventing over 400,000 cubic yards of sediment from entering coastal streams flowing through our forest;*
- 6. Upgrading of over 500 miles of roads including over 1400 watercourse crossings;*
- 7. Operating as an open and transparent business; including an open invitation to take interested individuals anywhere on our forest;*
- 8. Completing a substantial rebuild of our Scotia sawmill and recent purchase of the Scotia Biomass Steam and Energy plant, supporting Humboldt County’s infrastructure in the processing of wood products; and*
- 9. Employing 250 highly-skilled employees in Humboldt County earning family-level wages and benefits.*