

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

September 20, 2013

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Redwood National and State Parks Sign Sister Park Agreement with Parque Nacional Alerce Costero in Chile

From September 2-6, a team from Redwood National and State Parks (RNSP) traveled to the District of Los Ríos in southern Chile to conduct a series of workshops and public events with representatives of Parque Nacional Alerce Costero (PNAC) and the Corporación Nacional Forestal de Chile (CONAF), the government agency that oversees Chile's national parks. The entire cost of the trip was financed by a grant from the United States Department of State. On September 3rd, RNSP superintendent Stephen Prokop formally signed a Sister Park arrangement with Parque Nacional Alerce Costero in the city of La Unión. Following the signing, RNSP superintendent Prokop and California State Parks Superintendent Jeff Bomke presented the Chilean delegation with a redwood plaque commemorating the new partnership.

The long term goal of the park-to-park relationship is to improve the management of both parks through the exchange of information, best practices and technical expertise in the areas of forest restoration, interpretation and education, park relationships with indigenous peoples, and trail and road construction and maintenance.

RNSP and PNAC share amazingly similar histories, resources, and character. PNAC is Chile's newest national park established to protect the last remaining forests of coastal alerce trees (*Fitzroya cupressoides*), the tallest trees in South America and the second oldest living trees in the world. Forests within both parks are heavily impacted by decades of commercial logging and face years of intensive restoration efforts to restore old-growth forest conditions. Rural communities historically dependent on commercial timber industry surround the parks, as do indigenous communities with long histories and traditions within park lands. Lying on the edge of the Pacific Ocean at similar latitudes north and south of the equator, the parks have remarkably similar coastal climates with moderate temperatures and ample annual rainfall, and landscapes created and shaped by earthquakes and tsunamis.

During the week-long visit, the RNSP and PNAC/CONAF staff visited several project areas and discussed a wide variety of possible joint activities focused on ecological restoration and education. Several potential projects were outlined for the coming year, including an exchange of staff specialists in forest restoration to assist PNAC with long-term planning efforts, and park educators to learn from the successes of outdoor education programs in both parks. Opportunities to share staff expertise on road and trail construction and enhancing existing relationships with non-profit partners were also discussed.

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Among the highlights of the week-long visit was connecting Orick School students with students from Chaihuín School. A Skype video connection was established that allowed students from both schools which border the two parks to see each other and ask each other questions. With interpreters on both ends, students asked each other about what they like to do in their respective parks, what kinds of games they like to play, and what a typical day was like in their hometowns. After the video conference, students in Chaihuín planted a redwood seedling and an alerce seedling side-by-side in the school yard where they will grow as a symbol of the new alliance between the schools and the parks.

The National Park Service Sister Parks Program recognizes that parks around the world are linked together by a variety of natural and cultural phenomena. Where park resources and issues are similar, sharing experiences and best practices leads to better park management in both places. To date, the National Park Service and National Forest Corporation of Chile (CONAF), the managing agency of Chile's national park lands, have developed sister park agreements between Yosemite and Torres del Paine National Parks, and Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve in Alaska and the Francisco Coloane Marine and Coastal Protected Area in Chile. In 2010, funding the NPS received funding from the US State Department to develop joint projects under a US-Chile environmental cooperation agreement.

For further information on the Sister Park Agreement between Redwood National and State Parks and Parque Nacional Alerce Costero, please contact Stephen Prokop or Jeff Bomke at 707-465-7301.
