



## STATE OF STEWARDS

June, 2021

### Introduction

The Board of Directors of Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods (Stewards) is providing this document to openly share information with applicants for our Executive Director position at an exciting time of new possibilities as we emerge from the impacts of Covid-19 and the Walbridge fire. Included are: a description of the current state of the organization, key challenges and opportunities we face, and our vision for the future of Stewards. By providing this context, we hope to inspire and assist candidates in offering thoughtful responses during the application and interview process.

### About Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods

Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods (Stewards) is a non-profit organization launched in 1985 whose mission is to promote preservation through environmental education and stewardship in support of California State Parks' Russian River Sector in the Sonoma Mendocino Coast District. We are a leader in docent-led interpretive programs, significantly contributing to education, conservation and preservation at Armstrong Redwoods State Natural Reserve (SNR), Austin Creek State Recreation Area

(SRA) and Sonoma Coast State Park, encompassing 29,331 acres of coast, redwood groves and parkland. In 2019, Stewards welcomed over 1 million visitors to Armstrong SNR and Austin Creek SRA. Another 3.5 million visited Sonoma Coast State Park. Our public education programs touch the lives of more than 120,000 park visitors a year including 8,000 youth.

Stewards works in collaboration with California State Parks under two different agreements. Our Cooperating Association Agreement covers our work with the State Parks' *Volunteers in Parks Program*, which provides support for over 250 State Park volunteers who engage with Stewards staff to implement a variety of education and stewardship programs in our three park units, giving more than 10,000 hours annually and appreciably increasing the parks' organizational capacity. The other is a Co-Management Agreement, first signed in 2012 between Stewards and State Parks, that has just been renewed in 2021 for an additional five years with an option to extend for another five years to 2031. This agreement has proven to be especially successful in our District, as State Parks and Stewards leverage each other's expertise to manage the array of natural and cultural resources in our parks.

As we move forward at this critical juncture in the history of our country and of our public lands, Stewards is committed to ensuring that equity, diversity and justice are integral to the realization of our vision to serve as 'the link between people and their parks.'

### **Current State of the Organization**

In concert with so many others, the year 2020 brought challenges to Stewards including closed access to all of our parks for a period of time due to the pandemic, followed by the sweep of the Walbridge wildfire in August, which burned through over 5,000 acres of Austin Creek and a portion of the Armstrong Redwood Grove. These back-to-back circumstances created financial uncertainty for Stewards, as our usual income stream from fundraising events, gate revenues and retail sales were impaired. In recent months, with concerted effort, we have begun a strong recovery from these setbacks. Our community of supporters, local businesses, dedicated staff and board have rallied with us to face these challenges and remind us of what we **have not** lost.

### **Envisioning our Future**

As we continue to recover from 2020, staff and board are building on our current strategic plan to develop specific priorities for the future. The goals that Stewards is setting out to accomplish in the next three to five years include not only fire recovery and preservation of our natural surroundings, but a new vision for the experiences of our visitors and community. 'Impact' has taken on new meaning for us this year, as we address recovery from impacts of fire damage and park closures, in order to realize the impacts we seek in delivering to the communities we serve.

We look forward to building on the legacy of Stewards' long-serving Executive Director who will be retiring at the end of 2021. We share immense gratitude for her wise leadership and the strength she has brought to the Stewards organization, our finances, and our all-important relationship with California State Parks.

Facility Management and Operations will be a primary focus in the near future. Assessment of the wildfire damage, managing the recovery and rebuilding the infrastructure of Armstrong Redwoods SNR and Austin Creek SRA is a significant task we are working on with our State Park partners. This includes rehabilitating trails, fencing, bridges and campground facilities.

Future projects include upgrades to the Visitor Center facilities in both Jenner and at Armstrong Redwoods and improving signage throughout the Parks we hold in stewardship. We will focus on

accessibility, connecting with the communities we serve and recognizing the indigenous lands on which we sit. These all open up opportunities for Stewards to serve the community in unique and creative ways, incorporating principles of climate resilience and actions to internalize diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Volunteers are the backbone of Stewards. A small staff of highly experienced and dedicated people coordinate the work of hundreds of volunteers who provide school and community based education, docent-led interpretation of the Redwood Forest, Intertidal, and Marine ecosystems. This year created an unplanned break in our offerings of environmental education programs and has provided opportunities to update and renew our commitment to our curricula and youth programs. One partnership we are particularly excited about is with the Sonoma County Youth Ecology Corps (SCYEC). With Stewards serving as the in-park partner managing operations and interpretive programs related to the ecology and natural resources specific to our parks, and SCYEC as the in-community partner, we will be connecting youth in need, not only to their parks, but to services that help build bridges to their futures.

Volunteers also manage our two visitors' centers providing interpretive information and nature-focused retail sales. Stewards' volunteers also plan and execute exciting fundraising events such as the annual (well attended) Old Grove Festival, a musical event in our lovely Redwood Forest Amphitheater, and activities supporting Pond Farm Pottery, located in Austin Creek SRA, including designation in the National Register of Historic Places and a current nomination as a National Historic Landmark.

In the summer of 2020, Stewards Board and Staff made a strong commitment to address Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. A group has come together to help us navigate a better future, incorporating DEI across all aspects of our work.

Excellent financial management and ongoing fund development are ongoing strengths of Stewards as a nonprofit organization supporting the Russian River Sector of California State Parks for over 30 years. The organization's survival over the past year is evidence of the importance of that commitment to fiscal responsibility. Stewards is also fortunate to have a supportive local and regional community who love Armstrong Redwoods SNR, Austin Creek SRA and the Sonoma Coast State Park and provide significant financial support through donations, sponsorships, in-kind contributions and other needed services.

The work of the Stewards' staff and Board is carried out in partnership with California State Parks officials and staff, schools, community organizations, and sister nonprofit entities. These relationships must remain strong and steady for Stewards to be successful.

## **Conclusion**

This is a pivotal time in Stewards' history, presenting new challenges and exciting opportunities. As we continue to rise from the ashes of the Walbridge Fire, we strive to build upon the strong foundation of Stewards' commitment to our parks, staff, volunteers and community; the impressive legacy of our retiring Executive Director, including excellent working relationships with California State Parks; and overwhelming support from our donors, sponsors and funders. We invite candidates to respond to this compelling opportunity to lead our organization.