



FORESTS FOREVER

50 First St. Suite 401, San Francisco, California 94105

Phone: 415/974-3636 FAX: 415/974-3664

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Contact:

*Paul Hughes, executive director: (415) 974-4201; paul@forestsforever.org
Marc Lecard, communications manager: (415) 974-4202; marc@forestsforever.org*

Perata introduces Heritage Tree Act

Bill would protect ancient trees throughout California

On Friday, Feb. 24, Sen. Don Perata introduced the Heritage Tree Preservation Act, S.B. 1799, in the California Senate.

The bill would bring important protections for old-growth trees in California. Most of the state's old-growth forests have already been logged off. Existing protection for old growth is extremely spotty, and leaves the majority of ancient trees vulnerable to removal.

“Californians are surprised when they learn that these ancient trees are for the most part unprotected,” said Paul Hughes, executive director of Forests Forever. “It seems like common sense to protect trees as old or older than the state of California itself.”

The Heritage Tree Preservation Act would protect selected species of old-growth trees (coast redwood, giant sequoia, Port Orford cedar, douglas-fir and other evergreens and hardwoods) on non-federal forestland. This includes land owned by timber companies. The ban would apply to trees that meet species-specific minimum diameters and were alive in 1850.

Forests Forever board member Kent Stromsmoe, who crafted much of the bill's language, said many endangered species depend on old growth for survival. New trees can grow tall relatively quickly but cannot reproduce other old-growth characteristics, Stromsmoe said.

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As an example, Stromsmoe pointed to the marbled murrelet, a seabird that nests only in old growth, and depends on the high, large-diameter branches that only very old trees can provide.

Not only do old-growth trees deserve protection for their ecological benefits, Stromsmoe said, but also they are an irreplaceable part of history. He noted that some of California's old-growth trees affected by this legislation may have existed as long ago as 2700 B.C.

"The bill approaches (the trees) from a heritage standpoint. They were passed into our care from the past," Stromsmoe said.

Stromsmoe said that the bill's definition of forestland is very specific: It must be capable of growing a crop of trees to produce lumber or other forest products. In other words, the measure does not apply to trees in people's backyards.

The bill had a first reading on Feb. 27 and is now in the Rules Committee awaiting committee assignment.

Forests Forever is an active member of a coalition of environmental and religious groups called the Campaign for Old-Growth (CFOG), which strongly supports the Heritage Tree Preservation Act.