



GREAT REDWOOD TRAIL AGENCY

MEETING DATE: September 18, 2025

AGENDA ITEM: 5.

FROM: Elaine Hogan

RE: Resolution 2025-09 Environmental and Tribal Commitments

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The California Legislature envisioned the creation of the Great Redwood Trail, to be developed and managed by the Great Redwood Trail Agency (GRTA). The GRT, as directed to be created by state law, is in very substantial part, an environmental restoration project. In the context of the Legislature's direction, and to frame Board discussion and staff action regarding GRTA's ongoing efforts toward bringing the GRT to fruition, Staff proposes that the Board adopt a clear affirmation of GRTA's commitments to environmental restoration and tribal involvement. This framework will additionally help guide the expenditure of \$8,000,000 of Prop 4 funding currently on the Governor's desk for signature (the appropriations bill has not been signed at the time of this agenda posting). Regardless of funding allocations from Prop 4, Resolution 2025-09 proposes, for the board's consideration, the agency's policy direction and establishes specific, near-term actions staff will take to demonstrate progress. By affirming these values and operationalizing next steps, staff believes GRTA will affirm to the public, our partners, tribal governments and tribal organizations, that environmental restoration and tribal involvement are not peripheral, but central to the creation of the Great Redwood Trail. Staff believes the framework established by the resolution is appropriate regardless of the appropriations. However, if signed by the Governor, Prop 4 allocations of \$3,000,000 for "environmental restoration in the Eel River Canyon" and \$5,000,000 for the "preservation of tribal cultural resources along the Great Redwood Trail" would assist with carrying out implementation of the intent of this resolution.

BACKGROUND:

The Great Redwood Trail is, in substantial part, a restoration project. The Great Redwood Trail Agency (GRTA) was established by the California State Legislature to transform the former Northwestern Pacific Railroad corridor into a world-class trail system and public asset. GRTA's enabling legislation includes mandates to undertake: environmental assessment, environmental restoration and community engagement in partnership with conservation and environmental groups.

The master planning process has not yet completed, but Staff agree with community comments that its completion should ensure that the project protects the environment. Beyond providing transportation and recreational access, the trail corridor is also a landscape of sensitive ecological systems, and cultural and tribal cultural resources that require careful stewardship. The trail creates opportunities for environmental restoration, including removal of dilapidated railroad infrastructure, the restoration of native habitat, improvement of fish passage to the Eel and Russian Rivers from tributaries, and prevention of further erosion that desecrates sacred sites. These opportunities should be prioritized.

Equally important, the corridor traverses ancestral tribal lands. Therefore, tribal involvement is essential not only to honor and protect tribal cultural resources, but also to create pathways for tribal participation in environmental restoration and land stewardship. Our planning work has underscored the importance of aligning trail implementation with tribal values, knowledge, and rights, particularly in relation to cultural access and ecological management.

The California Legislature envisioned the creation of the Great Redwood Trail, to be developed and managed by the Great Redwood Trail Agency (GRTA). The GRT, as directed to be created by state law, is in very substantial part, an environmental restoration project. In the context of the Legislature's direction, and to frame Board discussion and staff action regarding GRTA's ongoing efforts toward bringing the GRT to fruition, Staff proposes that the Board adopt a clear affirmation of GRTA's commitments to environmental restoration and tribal involvement. This framework will additionally help guide the expenditure of \$8,000,000 of Prop 4 funding currently on the Governor's desk for signature (the appropriations bill has not been signed at the time of this agenda posting). Regardless of funding allocations from Prop 4, Resolution 2025-09 proposes, for the board's consideration, the agency's policy direction and establishes specific, near-term actions staff will take to demonstrate progress. By affirming these values and operationalizing next steps, staff believes GRTA will affirm to the public, our partners, tribal governments and tribal organizations, that environmental restoration and tribal involvement are not peripheral, but central to the creation of the Great Redwood Trail. Staff believes the framework established by the resolution is appropriate regardless of the appropriations. However, if signed by the Governor, Prop 4 allocations of \$3,000,000 for "environmental restoration in the Eel River Canyon" and \$5,000,000 for the "preservation of tribal cultural resources along the Great Redwood Trail" would assist with carrying out implementation of the intent of this resolution. 1

The intent of this item is to bring forward a clear affirmation of GRTA's commitments in these areas. The resolution outlines the agency's policy direction and establishes specific, near-term actions staff will take to demonstrate progress, including:

- Developing a framework to identify toxic pollutants from legacy railroad operations and assess options for clean-up in a consistent manner across the corridor;
- Creating a prioritized restoration checklist to integrate with trail development, beginning with the Eel River watershed;
- Developing a proposal for creation and facilitation of a Tribal Advisory Committee for Board consideration in early 2026;
- Developing a plan to invite tribes to participate in management of future segments of the GRT, with near-term goals of ensuring ceremonial and cultural gathering uses of the corridor;
- Exploring contracting opportunities to draw on tribal cultural knowledge in trail planning and implementation; and
- Advancing partnerships for ecological restoration in coordination with local, tribal, and conservation partners.

By affirming these values and operationalizing next steps, GRTA intends to affirm to the public, our partners, tribal governments and tribal organizations, that environmental restoration and tribal involvement are central to the creation of the Great Redwood Trail.

RECOMMENDATION:

Approve Resolution 2025-09 affirming stated values as the policy direction of the Agency and directing staff to undertake the described actions toward full involvement of California Native American tribes and tribal-led organizations and the implementation of environmental restoration activities.

FISCAL IMPACT:

None. However, if signed by the Governor, Prop 4 allocations of \$3,000,000 for "environmental restoration in the Eel River Canyon" and \$5,000,000 for the "preservation of tribal cultural resources along the Great Redwood Trail" would assist with carrying out implementation of the intent of this resolution.

ATTACHMENTS:

A. RESOLUTION 2025-09 ENVIRONMENTAL & TRIBAL COMMITMENTS

Resolution No. 2025-09

Resolution No. 2025-09
Environmental and Tribal
Commitments

WHEREAS, per GRTA’s enabling legislation (Government Code, Title 12, Section 93022(a))

GRTA shall do the following:

1. Complete an environmental assessment of the conditions of the rail rights-of-way for purposes of trail development.
2. Conduct a thorough community engagement process that includes landowners, trail advocates, environmental groups, and the community at large.
3. Use the services of the California Conservation Corps or certified community conservation corps for projects related to trails, environmental enhancements, and restoration, and other improvement projects

- 1 4. Use the services of conservation organizations for projects related to trails, fishing access,
2 fish passage barrier restoration, and other environmental enhancement, restoration, and
3 improvement projects; and,
4

5 **WHEREAS,** Great Redwood Trail development creates the opportunity for environmental
6 restoration along key waterways and early in project implementation planning, the GRTA and
7 local partners should identify opportunities for and invite tribal participation in ecological
8 restoration activities; and,
9

10 **WHEREAS,** the master planning process has resulted in recommendations to complete
11 additional studies that identify and assess:
12

- 13 • Stream restoration locations on the Eel River and Russian River to improve water
14 conveyance through trail design and remove fish passage barriers on tributaries that cross
15 GRTA property,
16
- 17 • Trail design features that prevent further erosion,
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- 19 • Opportunities to enhance ecological habitat with native plant species,
20 • Opportunities for environmental restoration including the removal of dilapidated railroad
21 infrastructure; and,
22

23 **NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE**
24 **GREAT REDWOOD TRAIL AGENCY** as follows:
25

- 26 1. The GRTA Board hereby adopts the below stated values as the policy direction of the
27 Agency with respect to topics contained therein, and further declares that through the
 creation of the Great Redwood Trail and the stewardship of lands GRTA owns and
 manages it is our intent and staff are hereby directed to, to the extent feasible:

- a. Protect, preserve, and restore sensitive natural and cultural resources along the trail corridor,
- b. Develop long-term relationships and engage in robust dialog consistent with the goal of aligning protection and preservation of tribal and cultural resources with the implementation of the Great Redwood Trail corridor.
- c. Remove environmentally damaging railroad infrastructure and restore fish passage and other ecologically important features,
- d. Steward, honor, and care for the land.

2. Staff are directed to undertake the following actions toward full involvement of California Native American tribes and tribal-led organizations:

- a. Respectfully and proactively communicate with tribes to build long-term relationships and dialog consistent with the goal of aligning preservation of tribal and cultural resources with the implementation of the Great Redwood Trail,
- b. Direct staff to develop a proposal for creation and facilitation of a Tribal Advisory Committee and to return to the Board with a recommendation at the regular January 2026 meeting,
- c. Explore contract opportunities to draw on local tribal cultural knowledge relevant to planning and implementation of GRTA's mandate,
- d. Develop a plan for inviting tribes to participate in management of portions of the Great Redwood Trail that may cross ancestral tribal lands, particularly with reference to ensuring ceremonial and cultural gathering uses are facilitated and prioritized; and,

e. Continue to maintain the highest degree of confidentiality with respect to the information generated from communicating with tribal representatives within applicable law.

3. Staff are directed to undertake the following actions toward the implementation of environmental restoration activities, providing the board with regular updates and returning to the board with results of work conducted:

a. Develop a consistent, actionable framework to identify, assess, and remediate toxic pollutants resulting from railroad operations along the GRTA-controlled right-of-way of the former Northwestern Pacific Railroad,

b. Develop a prioritized checklist and maps that the GRTA Board of Directors and staff can utilize to identify and prioritize restoration projects to be incorporated into segment level trail development in the Eel River watershed using the forthcoming Eel River Restoration and Conservation Program (ERRCP) Phase 2 Restoration and/or Conservation Action Plans CalTrout is producing under a grant from California Department of Fish & Wildlife (CDFW).

c. Operationalize recommendations into Agency trail development policy and decision-making.

Introduced and adopted this ____ day of _____, at a meeting of the Board of Directors of Great Redwood Trail Agency by the following vote:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ABSTAIN:

ATTEST:

GRTA Executive Director

GRTA Chair