

Growth puts pressure on California's state parks

By Marjie Lundstrom and Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

At the Riverwood Inn in rural Humboldt County, where a Harley-Davidson flag flaps on a light pole beneath the Stars and Stripes, the proprietor is steaming mad.

Some 15 miles south of Loreen Eliason's roadhouse, the California Department of Transportation is planning to widen a twisty stretch of Highway 101 through Richardson Grove State Park, home to one of the world's last old-growth redwood forests. Although Caltrans has assured the public the ancient giants won't be harmed, some residents and activists are alarmed by the very prospect of disturbing the trees' shallow root systems.

"I was born up here. I'm connected to those trees," said Eliason, who has joined a lawsuit to halt the road plan.

"Those uppity-ups in Sacramento. ... They absolutely can't say for certain they won't hurt the trees," she said. "I was more than glad to jump into the lawsuit."

As civilization closes in on many of California's 278 state parks, legal and emotional battles are erupting up and down the Golden State. With 1.3 million acres in public hands – much of it the most prized real estate in California – the state's parks increasingly find themselves poked at and even assaulted by outside pressures.

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