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## **\$2.6M available for oak woodland restoration**



Conifers encroaching on oak woodlands near Bridgeville.  
courtesy University of California Cooperative Extension

By Hunter Cresswell, [hcresswell@times-standard.com](mailto:hcresswell@times-standard.com)

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When people think of the North Coast, they may think of mighty redwood forests full of ancient trees towering overhead — but few reflect on the region’s interior sprawling oak woodlands, at risk of being taken over by young conifer forests.

Now a partnership, led by University of California Cooperative Extension, has succeeded in getting the Natural Resources Conservation Service

Regional Conservation Partnership Program to make \$2.6 million available to private landowners with oak stands being invaded by Douglas firs and other conifers in Humboldt, Mendocino and Trinity counties.

“We’re seeing this immense loss of our oak woodlands” UC Cooperative Extension project lead Lenya Quinn-Davidson said. “We want to see those oaks survive.”

Landowners experiencing conifer forests encroaching on oak woodlands on their property can apply for grant money to fund the removal of young conifers that, given the time to grow in numbers, would create a canopy over the oaks, depriving them of sunlight.

“The oaks are really important for habitat and biodiversity,” Quinn-Davidson said.

These applications can be made in the coming months, UC Cooperative Extension forest advisor Yana Valachovic said.

The estimated 100,000 acres of oak woodlands in Humboldt County have been affected since indigenous populations — who commonly set forest fires as a land management practice — were almost wiped out by settlers starting in the 1800s and fire suppression became common practice in the 1930s.

“Almost all of it is facing some kind of challenge from conifer encroachment,” Valachovic said.

Humboldt State forestry department faculty Rosemary Sherriff works with a group that, in part, will study the effectiveness of these restoration projects.

“There hasn’t been a lot of research in the recovery,” she admitted.

But as these efforts move forward over the next five years, the woodlands will be monitored to see how they react to having the conifers removed.

“It involves primarily cutting down young Douglas firs,” Sherriff said.

The funds will be available only to property owners because 80 percent of oak woodlands in Humboldt County are on private land, Quinn-Davidson said.

“It’s a huge deal and it’s going to give landowners the ability to do this restoration,” she said.

The partnership that lobbied for this special reserve of funds for this particular purpose includes the North Coast Oak Woodland Conservation Project, Cal Fire, the Watershed Research and Training Center, the North Coast Regional Land Trust, U.S. Fish and Wildlife, the Mattole Restoration Council, Yager/Van Duzen Environmental Stewards and the Mendocino County Resource Conservation District.

More information can be found by calling the UC Cooperative Extension at 445-7351.

“A lot of people associate Humboldt County with redwoods and forget we have all these great oak woodlands,” Quinn-Davidson said.

With luck, this project will see the successful restoration of these oak stands.

“It’s not everywhere and it’s not easy to make more of,” Valachovic said.

*Hunter Cresswell can be reached at 707-441-0506.*