

## Tourism & Outdoor Recreation Sector — Project Interview Summary

# Redwood Region – Redwood Trail Alliance

*Representative Interviewed: Tom Boss*  
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## Assets

Think about the natural assets — public lands, parks, trails, or other features — and the community assets — community facilities, airports, train stations, unique areas, and/or cultural events — that draw visitors to the region, and how the project connects to them. Then consider what kinds of investments, whether in staff capacity, coordination, or regional information sharing, the project would most benefit from to move forward.

### Consider:

- *What natural assets attract people to the region, and how does the project connect to them?*
- *What community assets attract and bring people to the region, and how does the project connect to them?*
- *What investments would most help the project advance?*

### Discussion Points

#### Opportunities:

- Natural Assets
  - **State public land**
    - Trione-Annadel State Park and Willow Creek State Park
  - **Regional parks**
    - , Monte Rio Redwoods Regional Park and Open Space Preserve
  - **Landscape diversity** includes redwood forests, Myakama volcanic range, and oak grasslands
- Community Assets and Regional Access
  - The region draws **global visitors** through a dense concentration of cultural and culinary assets: vineyards, world-class beer, cheese, music festivals, and breweries
  - Creative partnerships with **local businesses** (i.e. a trail beer release with Old Caz Brewery benefiting Friends of Treonianale and RTA) extend the organization's reach and funding base

#### Challenges:

- No significant asset-level challenges were identified.

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**Policy & Regulations**

Reflect on the policies or regulations the project has encountered, and whether they have opened doors or created roadblocks. Consider also where the policy landscape simply does not match conditions on the ground, and whether a governance structure — like a joint powers authority or special district — could help bridge that gap.

**Consider:**

- *Which policies or regulations have helped or hindered the project?*
- *Where does the policy landscape not match reality on the ground, and what structures might help?*

**Discussion Points**

*Opportunities:*

- Stronger **CEQA exemptions** for pilot projects would allow new approaches to be tested before full environmental review is required
- Recreation funding and policy should be aligned with **habitat restoration** frameworks, which currently receive disproportionately more support despite trails serving far more people
- Elevated thresholds for DIR **prevailing wage** compliance on smaller projects would meaningfully reduce cost and administrative burden
- More discretion in **contractor selection** (beyond lowest-bid requirements) would improve project quality and allow for better-aligned partners
- Agencies lack policy on the creation and management of **social trails**, but the public creates them when they are not served

*Challenges:*

- **CEQA scope** has far exceeded its original intent through decades of litigation; monitoring requirements can shut down crews for days or weeks over minor wildlife encounters, and small capital projects in the tens to hundreds of thousands of dollars cannot absorb these compliance costs
- **CEQA exemptions** are too easily challenged; agencies frequently apply extra conditions to avoid lawsuits, particularly in affluent neighborhoods, adding cost and delay that has nothing to do with environmental protection
- Consultants sometimes introduce **late-stage survey requirements** that delay projects significantly, creating perverse incentives within the compliance system
- Trail classifications do not align with **DIR labor categories**, forcing organizations to use ill-fitting designations like "landscaping" or "carpentry," complicating compliance and cost estimation

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- Private money spent on state facilities still triggers **prevailing wage** requirements: paying \$70 to \$80 per hour instead of a livable \$35 to \$40 per hour results in half the work being completed for the same dollar investment
- The state has not clearly defined what **funding can be used on federal land**, leaving organizations in an ambiguous position when pursuing state grants for federal land projects

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**Funding**

Consider what funding opportunities have been identified and pursued, and what **challenges** have arisen if none are available. Think about how well current funding aligns with the actual needs and timeline — including reimbursement structures, long-term maintenance, and the ability to braid multiple sources together — and whether a capacity gap exists between the project and the funding it requires.

**Consider:**

- *What funding opportunities have been found, and what gaps or challenges remain?*
- *How well does available funding match the project's real needs, and can multiple funding sources be leveraged?*

**Discussion Points**

*Opportunities:*

- State investment in a **grants clearinghouse** function that would help organizations identify appropriate funding sources and understand bid packet requirements could save significant time and resources across the sector
- Funding mechanisms **modeled on highway project maintenance** planning could normalize long-term stewardship funding for trail infrastructure
- Legislation is in development for an organization analogous to a parks nonprofit but oriented toward outdoor recreation broadly, which could create a more **durable funding structure**
- Colorado and Nevada both have **dedicated state recreation departments**; Nevada's in particular is seen as a strong model worth examining

*Challenges:*

- **Grant programs** are severely oversubscribed (150 applications competing for 4 to 6 awards) indicating a fundamental mismatch between available funding and sector need

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- Most funding is restricted to capital projects and **cannot be used for maintenance, overhead, or administrative costs**, leaving the ongoing work of stewardship perpetually unfunded
- **Non-motorized recreation** has no dedicated funding source comparable to the OHV tax, despite non-motorized trail users far outnumbering motorized ones
- **Proposition 4's** original legislation did not think through all implementation issues, creating complications particularly around income components; amendments or more flexible policies are needed
- Hundreds of millions in funding are reportedly available, but the landscape is so difficult to navigate that organizations cannot reliably access it; **clarity and navigation support** are as important as the funding itself
- **Wildlife Conservation Board** funds may be accessible for recreation but eligibility is unclear

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**Data**

Think about what data resources exist in the region to support your project — things like visitation numbers, economic impact, or user behavior — and what is missing that should be measured. Consider who owns the data, what happens to it when the project ends, and whether data to demonstrate the project's value to the agencies and funders who need to act on it can be used.

**Consider:**

- *What data is available and what important data is still missing?*
- *Who owns the data, and can it be used to make the case to funders and decision-makers?*

**Discussion Points**

*Opportunities:*

- **Phone-based location data** is emerging as a useful and relatively accessible tool for tracking trail visitation
- Agencies hold relevant data, and improved **data-sharing agreements** could significantly strengthen the advocacy and grant-making case for trail investment

*Challenges:*

- **Quantifying trail project benefits** beyond anecdotal evidence and partner letters remains a persistent challenge, weakening grant applications and policy advocacy
- **Strava data** is limited in usefulness: not all trail users participate, and activity is heavily concentrated in certain areas, skewing the picture

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- Bike industry and outdoor companies either do not have or will not share **sales data** that could help demonstrate recreation's economic footprint
- **Visit California data resources** are not well known among trail-focused organizations, suggesting an outreach and awareness gap
- **Connecting weather disruption data to visitation impact** data is methodologically difficult, making it hard to quantify climate costs to the recreation economy

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**Climate Change**

Reflect on whether climate change is a factor in the project — through shifting seasons, temperature fluctuations, or changing visitor behaviors — and how the project is responding or adapting. Consider whether the project is connected to climate resilience or mitigation funding, and what it would take to do so.

**Consider:**

- *How is climate change affecting the project, and how are the project sponsors responding?*
- *Is the project connected to climate resilience or mitigation funding opportunities?*

**Discussion Points**

*Opportunities:*

- Current year conditions (moist ground and stable weather) are **favorable for construction**
- Dead tree management from fire snags and Sudden Oak disease, while burdensome, is generating **consistent annual work** that could anchor workforce pipelines

*Challenges:*

- **Extended wet seasons** disrupt project timelines and organizational capacity in ways that are difficult to plan around
- New weather patterns now require a second brushing pass within a single season, adding **unbudgeted maintenance costs**
- Dead tree management from both **Sudden Oak disease and fire snags** has become a perpetual annual burden with no dedicated funding stream
- **Flooding** is an emerging concern with implications for trail infrastructure integrity
- Wildfire damage creates remediation work but also forces **trail advisories that reduce visitation**, with downstream economic effects that are difficult to quantify

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## **Workforce**

Think about the workforce gaps standing in the way of the project moving forward, and whether the project's proponents are finding the skills, contractors, and project managers they need locally. Consider also whether the project creates opportunities to build longer-term workforce pipelines through partnerships with community colleges, workforce boards, or local hire programs.

**Consider:**

- *What workforce gaps are slowing the project, and is the project finding the talent needed locally?*
- *Does the project create opportunities to build long-term workforce pipelines in the region?*

### **Discussion Points**

*Opportunities:*

- The region has a **decent applicant pool** when positions are posted, and the Bay Area recreation economy draws workers from outside the region
- **California Conservation Corps** trains workers from outside the Bay Area who then find local employment, functioning as an informal regional pipeline
- A **volunteer trail coordinator training program** is being developed that could create a clear pathway to paid positions
- Laborers can be trained and promoted to operator or planner roles; the **Santa Cruz trails ladder program** is a proven model worth replicating

*Challenges:*

- Young people are often **unaware** that trail work is a paid career

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## **Collaboratives**

Reflect on the collaborative relationships your project depends on — across jurisdictions, land managers, or tribal partners — and where those relationships are accelerating progress or slowing things down. Consider whether there is a regional body or coordination structure your project needs but does not yet have access to.

**Consider:**

- *What collaborative relationships does your project depend on, and where are they helping or hindering?*
- *Is there a regional body or coordination structure you need but don't yet have?*

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**Discussion Points**

*Opportunities:*

- All **collaborative relationships** are described as helpful; RTA works primarily with state parks, counties, and local government, with no federal land involvement currently
- The park's **nonprofit partner** funds 80 to 90 percent of Treonianale Annadelle work, demonstrating the leverage a strong nonprofit-agency partnership can provide
- A **practical division of labor** with Regional Parks Foundation (the Foundation purchases materials while RTA coordinates volunteers) maximizes what each partner does best
- **Private donors** in Napa write checks directly for trails in their neighborhoods on county land with master plan approval
- **Regional variation** in how trail work is organized offers useful comparative models: Marin uses in-house crews, Napa and Sonoma bid out work, and the East Bay is growing in-house capacity

*Challenges:*

- **Prevailing wage** requirements are inconsistently triggered depending on how money flows: private funds going directly to RTA avoid the requirement, but the same funds routed through a park nonprofit partner may trigger it, complicating project planning
- Potential expansion into **Lake County federal lands** is being deliberately deferred due to the additional regulatory complexity that federal land involvement introduces

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**Branding & Marketing**

Think about whether your project or region has a clear identity, and how effectively you are telling your story to your community, to funders, and to decision-makers at the state and federal level. Consider whether your project's brand or identity could go beyond marketing to become a tool for financing, advocacy, or building political will.

**Consider:**

- *Does your project or region have a clear identity, and how well are you telling that story?*
- *Could your project's brand become a financing or advocacy tool, not just a marketing one?*

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**Discussion Points**

*Opportunities:*

- RTA has an **established brand identity** that is recognized and amplified by regional parks and foundation partners through newsletters and media coverage
- The organization's **nonprofit status** is actively used as a tool for financing, advocacy, and marketing
- A goal of reaching over 50% **public awareness** among park users is defined and achievable with additional investment

*Challenges:*

- The majority of park users are currently **unaware of RTA's work** despite strong project delivery and partner recognition
- **Newspapers** are declining in relevance as a media channel, and no clear replacement strategy for earned media has emerged
- Increased public presence requires funding that does not currently exist, creating a catch-22 where **visibility investment** competes with operational needs