

News Release

National Wildlife Refuge System



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For immediate release:

New Champion Sitka Spruce at Cape Meares National Wildlife Refuge

A new Oregon state champion Sitka spruce has been designated and it's on public land in Tillamook County. The giant Sitka Spruce, the largest known representative of its kind in the state, is 144 feet high and is located within Cape Meares National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). The Cape Meares champion spruce was designated after winter storms toppled the The Klootch Creek Spruce in December. The Klootch Creek Spruce held the post of national champion Sitka Spruce for 34 years and was the first tree to be designated an Oregon State Heritage Tree. Knowing that the Klootch Creek Spruce was in decline as a result of a huge cavity exposed from a previous storm, two arborists, Brian French and Will Koomjian, who lead expeditions to climb and measure the largest trees of each species, started querying tree watchers about other large Sitka Spruce trees in the Northwest. French and Koomjian operate under the name Ascending the Giants and their stated goal for these climbs are to aid in preservation efforts for champion trees and to raise awareness of the importance of trees and the sensitive ecosystems that exist in and around them.

While designation as a state champion tree does not come with legal protection, the Cape Meares Spruce is already protected from harvest due to its location within the federally protected Refuge. The Refuge itself was established in 1938 to protect a remnant patch of coastal old growth forest and the surrounding rocky cliff habitat used by seabirds as breeding habitat. In fact all of Cape Meares Refuge, with the exception of Oregon Coast Trail, was further designated a Research Natural Area (RNA) in 1987, which requires that natural processes are allowed to continue without management interference from humans. Activities on RNAs are limited to research, study, observation, monitoring, and educational activities that are non-destructive, non-manipulative, and maintain unmodified conditions. RNA designation for Cape Meares Refuge

was awarded to showcase the Sitka spruce forest and coastal shrublands of the area and was further considered an important site in the RNA program as it represents the most northerly stand of old growth Sitka spruce remaining along the Oregon coast.

According to French, “the massive sitka spruce shows all the hallmarks of coastal life: vigorous growth and numerous breakouts.” Like the Klootchey Creek tree the Cape Meares Spruce had its top half blown out in a storm so the tree has a stout appearance. French postulates that the tree is probably in the age range of 750 to 800 years old and is in rough condition with decay in its core. Visitors can see the Cape Meares champion Sitka spruce by hiking a short trail that branches off (to the south) from the Oregon Coast Trail which meanders through the heart of the old-growth forest on the Refuge. Cape Meares is located along the Three Capes Scenic Route approximately ten miles west of the town of Tillamook. When approaching Tillamook on US Highway 101, follow signs for the Three Capes Scenic Route and the town of Oceanside. Turn west into a small graveled parking lot to access the trailhead at the entrance to Cape Meares.

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