

GIANTS RISING

The Secrets, the Saga and the Wisdom of Redwoods

A FEATURE DOCUMENTARY (82 min.), 2024



NARRATED BY CHART-TOPPING MUSICAL ARTIST MICHAEL FRANTI



An immersive journey into the heart of America's most iconic forests, GIANTS RISING reveals the secrets and the saga of the redwoods, including revelations that could help sustain us all.



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PRODUCTIONS

GIANTS RISING PRESS KIT 2024

LOGLINE

An immersive journey into the heart of America’s most iconic forests, *Giants Rising* reveals the secrets, superpowers and the saga of the coast redwoods—including revelations that could help sustain us all.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

A journey into the heart of America’s most iconic forests, *GIANTS RISING* reveals the secrets and the saga of the coast redwoods—the tallest and among the oldest living beings on Earth. It’s an epic tale that immerses us in the wonders and majesty of these trees, while exploring our ever-evolving relationship with them. Living links to the past, redwoods hold powers that may play a role in our future, including their ability to withstand fire and capture carbon, to offer clues about longevity, and even to enhance our own well-being. Through the voices of scientists, artists, Native communities and others, we discover the many connections that sustain these forests and the promise of solutions that will help us ALL rise up to face the challenges that lay ahead.

LONGER SYNOPSIS

A journey into the heart of America’s most iconic forests, *GIANTS RISING* reveals the secrets and the saga of the coast redwoods—the tallest and among the oldest living beings on Earth. It’s an epic tale that explores the wonders of these silent giants and our dramatic, ever-evolving relationship with them. Living links to the past, redwoods also hold powers that may play a role in our future, including their ability to withstand fire and capture carbon, to offer clues about resilience, and even to enhance our own well-being. How do they do it, and how will redwoods keep working their magic as they’re pushed to their limits?

Through the voices of biologists, artists, Native communities and others racing to understand and safeguard these trees, *GIANTS RISING* reveals the scientific wonders of redwoods, our deep cultural ties to them, and efforts to help these iconic forests overcome the legacy of logging that nearly wiped them out. It’s a story that offers lessons about resilience and connection, and the promise of solutions that will help us ALL rise up from the past and face the challenges that lay ahead.

ABOUT THE FILM

Giants Rising is a feature-length documentary that tells the epic tale of America’s iconic redwood trees, transporting viewers into the heart of some of the most rare, remote and awe-inspiring forests. The film paints a cinematic portrait of these forests through three lenses: human well-being, scientific wonder and environmental conservation – and shows how all of these elements are entwined. The narrative underscores how our individual and collective resilience, like that of the redwoods, is deeply dependent on our connections to each other and to the natural world. The film is an ode to redwoods, but also a call to recognize the many benefits there are to reap from spending time in any forest and ensuring that they all continue to rise up.

Directed by long-time documentary filmmaker **Lisa Landers**, the idea for this film was born from her personal experiences living, working and finding healing among the redwoods. Narrated by acclaimed musician **Michael Franti**, Lisa and Michael first met in the canopy of an ancient redwood tree in 1998, where they had both climbed hundreds of feet to visit Julia Butterfly Hill – the activist who sat in the tree for two years to ensure it wouldn't be cut down. Lisa had come to interview Julia for a news segment, and it was at that moment that she began asking the question: what is it about these trees that inspires people to take such incredible risks on their behalf? In making this film, Lisa has been able to delve into questions like these and share what she discovered.

The film is presented as a tapestry of stories, woven through the voices of redwood devotees. Those featured include a redwood geneticist searching for the source of the trees' biological superpowers, members of the Yurok Tribe trying to restore cultural and physical connections within their ancestral redwood forests, and a photographer attempting to create a 310-foot portrait of an ancient giant and display it in an urban setting. Through commentary from a social psychologist, the film also explores how every foray into these forests is an opportunity to enhance our wellness, deepen our connections to nature, and come together to help safeguard the trees' future.

The story of our relationship with the redwoods is dramatic and ever-evolving – from the sacred role they've played in the lives of Native tribes, to the clear-cutting of 95% of the ancient redwoods for timber by European settlers, to the race to protect the remaining groves. Like the enchanted woods that they evoke, most redwood forests are already relegated to storybooks. The coast redwoods (cousins to the giant Sequoias) are found only along a 450-mile ribbon of Pacific shoreline stretching from California's Big Sur to the border of southern Oregon. Only a quarter of these redwoods are now protected, and many are still struggling to recover from the legacy of logging.

The film briefly retraces the path that put these trees in such a vulnerable state, as well as some of the battles that have long been waged to turn the tides. For more than a century, people have been fighting to recast the value of redwoods from a commodity to an essential provider of services to the environment -- and to our own well-being. Increasingly, we're tapping these trees not just for lumber, but for their ability to widen our perspectives and help us find peace amidst the stresses of our hectic lives. But whereas the battles of the past were fought to halt logging, the redwood saviors of today are mostly contending with new perils wrought by climatic changes that are spurring droughts, wildfires and other extreme conditions that these fragmented forests may not be able to withstand without our help.

In GIANTS RISING, the story of these conservation efforts is largely told in two parks at either end of the range where gripping dramas are unfolding that put the redwoods' resilience on display, while calling into question the role that we can play in this next chapter of their tale.

On California's north coast, **Redwood National and State Parks** safeguard half the world's old growth redwoods. Here, animals like Roosevelt elk lurk among giant ferns and fungi, and rare Northern spotted owls and wandering salamanders grace the canopies. We also find swaths of clear-cut land whose spindly trees have none of the resilience or grandeur of their predecessors, threatening the stability of the ecosystem and spurring heroic efforts to ensure that a stronger generation of redwoods rises up.

At the southern end of the redwood range, the redwoods' resilience was put to the test a few years ago as devastating fires swept through **Big Basin Redwoods State Park** – California's oldest state park and the place where the fight to protect redwoods first began. Park Interpreter **Susan Blake** tells the tale of how this park was saved 125 years ago and also offers a harrowing first-hand account of the 2020 fire, illustrated by footage of infernos blazing inside trees and smoke billowing through leafy canopies under an orange sky. Through the chronicle of this event, we explore the role humans played in creating the conditions that lead to this disaster, the redwoods' astounding resilience, and lessons about recovery that the redwoods have to offer us.

As the film winds down, signs of hope abound including:

- Against all odds the redwood genome is mapped, which could lead to the unlocking of the tree's "superpowers," like their legendary resilience and longevity. This genomic coding could also be used to create a 23 & Me type of tool for identifying and replanting the most resilient redwoods in an effort to fortify future forests.
- The Yurok Tribe begins collaborating with parks and other organizations, including an ambitious plan ("Redwoods Rising") to restore more than 70,000 acres of forest ecosystems. Plans also get underway to reinvigorate Yurok traditions, including carving more redwood canoes and the establishment of a Yurok cultural center at the gateway to Redwood National & State Parks.
- In the aftermath of the fires at Big Basin Park, the redwoods prove their resilience. The trees are resprouting and the entire forest is bursting with life. An opportunity arises to reimagine this park in a new way, knowing better what the trees need from us -- and what they don't.
- Artist Sarah Bird completes her life-size portrait of "Old Tree" and her plans begin taking shape for displaying this massive redwood as a projection on a skyscraper in San Francisco and other cities where redwoods once stood.

In the closing minutes of the film, social psychologist Paul Piff contemplates the reasons why we evolved to feel such intense awe among redwoods... "We think that awe might have evolved as an emotion for humans because it helped us connect to others and to be more cooperative. Our ability to forgo self-interest in the favor of larger common goals, that is critical to how we survive as a species. I think redwoods and experiences in nature are one of the primary ways in which people get to be reminded that I'm a small part of this bigger world and I need to do things to help protect it."

Michael Franti's parting words remind us to heed the wisdom of the redwoods, including the value of reaching our full potential, of staying connected, and of preserving these forests so they can continue bestowing their gifts on us all. Franti's performance of his song "Brighter Day" closes the film out on an uplifting and hopeful note.

ANIMATIONS & SCIENTIFIC WONDER

As scientist **Zane Moore** says, "You don't need to know anything about the science of these trees to be just FLOORED by them. But if you do know some of the science, awe can be inspired even more."

Beautiful animations created by the award-winning team **Little Fluffy Clouds** enable us to delve into the more scientific aspects of the redwoods, including how our brains respond to awe sparked by these trees. The voices of scientists along with animations, graphics and cinematography reveal how:

- redwoods nourish themselves by drinking from the fog,
- an entire grove may all be connected to a single “mother” tree,
- chemicals coursing through these trees defend them against pests, rot, fire and other extremes,
- they can store more carbon above ground than any other forest on Earth,
- reading the redwoods’ rings may help us predict and prepare for the future,
- and how every tiny redwood seed contains a massively long and complicated genetic blueprint.

REDWOOD SOUNDSCAPE

Sound designers and engineers from **Skywalker Sound** created and choreographed a soundscape that is not only evocative of the redwood forests, but amplifies and reveals sounds we wouldn’t normally be able to hear. One of the biggest challenges was trying to convey the wonderful silence of being among redwoods. Like stepping outside after a heavy snowfall, the forest creates an auditory chamber in which sounds resonate in a distinct way -- held by the canopy above and softened by the layer of duff on the ground. The soundscape is interwoven with a majestic score created by **Cody Westheimer**, which accentuates the ethereal feel of the forest, while also accentuating the dramatic arc of the narrative.

SOCIAL IMPACT CAMPAIGN & PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

As photographer Sarah Bird points out, “the story of the redwoods is the story of our relationship with the natural world.” Redwoods aren’t the only trees struggling to overcome a legacy of human impacts, and all kinds of trees now have a fighting chance thanks to groundbreaking research, reintegration of Native knowledge, and a growing awareness of how our lives are connected to the fate of our forests.

The #GiantsRising social impact campaign will launch alongside the film to encourage viewers to learn more and support the conservation and restoration of redwood forests. The campaign will also foster public exploration of the many health and wellness benefits associated with spending time in redwoods and other forests and highlight the wisdom and stewardship of Native communities that have managed these forests for millennia. #GiantsRising has partnered with several organizations and academic institutions that have long supported redwood research and conservation, and play a key role in getting people into the woods to reap the benefits. Through screenings, educational resources, sensory experiences and direct-action campaigns the film will support and amplify initiatives of groups such as:

- [The Save The Redwoods League](#) Organization that’s protected and restored redwoods since 1918.
- [The Yurok Tribe](#) Native Tribe whose ancestral lands lie within Redwood National & State Parks
- [Redwood Rx](#) Non-profit program providing immersive and therapeutic programs in the redwoods.
- [California State Parks](#) & [Redwood National Park](#) Preserving redwoods and providing public access.

Visit www.giantsrising.com to learn more about how you can:

Experience the awe of the redwoods or any forest near you;

Discover the wonders of the redwoods, including the benefits they offer to our health and well-being;

Take Action to conserve and restore redwood forest.

AWARDS & FESTIVAL SELECTIONS

Best Environmental Documentary, Arizona International Film Festival

Special Jury Prize for Outstanding Cinematography, Arizona International Film Festival

Santa Barbara International Film Festival

DC Environmental Film Festival

DocLands Film Festival

International Wildlife Film Festival

Mendocino Film Festival

Martha's Vineyard Environmental Film Festival

Boulder Outdoors Environmental Film Festival

Nevada Women's Film Festival

Sundance Nature Series

From CA Film/DocLands Festival...

The towering redwood forests of Northern California are among nature's most magnificent spectacles. Through the prism of Indigenous wisdom, scientific discovery, and artistic expression, this film illuminates the mysteries of these colossal beings: their impressive endurance, of more than 2,000 years, and their distinctive adaptive mechanisms, including innate defenses against wildfires. Director Lisa Landers captures the awe-inspiring scenery with magnificent cinematography, enhanced by state-of-the-art animation techniques which vividly bring the forests' inner world to life. Insightful interviews with Yurok tribal members, scientists, and conservationists emphasize the pressing need to protect these vital ecosystems, while Michael Franti's narration and musical arrangements, further heightened by Skywalker Sound, carry us on an immersive auditory journey, deep into the woods.

FEATURED INTERVIEWEES

SARAH BIRD *Artist/Photographer*

Awestruck by the redwoods, Sarah sets out to create a 310-foot portrait of an ancient tree and display it in an urban setting where many more people can experience it. But doing this proves to be no small feat.

PAUL PIFF *Social Psychologist, UC Irvine*

Paul's commentary throughout the film explores how and why redwoods spark intense awe and other

emotions -- and how time spent in these forests offers many benefits to our well-being.

ZANE MOORE *Redwood Geneticist, UC Davis*

When he's not playing his French horn, Zane spends his time decoding the secrets of redwood genetics -- and is part of the team that has finally begun to crack the code.

TODD E. DAWSON *Tree Biologist, UC Berkeley*

Following his ground-breaking discoveries about how redwoods are able to sustain such enormous "bodies," Todd turns his attention to exploring how climate shifts are impacting the trees' fortitude.

SUSAN BLAKE *Park Interpreter, California State Parks*

A historian and educator in California's oldest state park (Big Basin), Susan recounts the story of how the Park's redwoods were saved 125 years ago -- and the fire that recently ravaged this forest, and her home.

LEONEL ARGUELLO *Deputy Superintendent, Redwood National and State Parks*

For more than 30 years Leonel has helped oversee the restoration of harvested forests that are part of Redwood National Park. Thanks to an unprecedented collaboration he now has an opportunity to foster the return of 70,000 acres of redwoods.

ALLYSON CARROLL *Dendrochronologist, Cal Poly Humboldt*

Like a translator of ancient texts, Allyson is able to read the redwoods' rings to learn about past climate changes and other historic events -- including information that could be used to predict the future.

STEPHEN SILLETT & MARIE ANTOINE *Forest Ecologists & Botanists, Cal Poly Humboldt*

Pioneers of the redwood canopy, they've documented this hidden realm and observed elusive creatures that depend on these trees. They also figured out that old redwoods have an unsurpassed ability to capture carbon and lock it away for thousands of years.

ROSIE CLAYBURN *Yurok Tribal Heritage Preservation Officer*

Rosie explains the Yurok's sacred connection to the redwood forest, including how the life force of these trees continues into timber used to make houses and canoes. Like the trees themselves, the Yurok Tribe was nearly obliterated, along with their culture. Rosie is on a mission to revive their cultural traditions, and gain a seat at the table where decisions are made about their ancestral forests.

BARRY McCOVEY Jr. *Yurok Tribal Fisheries Department Director*

Trained as a biologist, Barry reveals how salmon and redwoods are totally interdependent, and explains the importance of salmon to Yurok people. Both salmon and redwoods are struggling to survive, but he finds hope as Yurok crews and insights are being called on to help restore essential redwood waterways.

DAVE SEVERNS *Yurok Canoe Carver*

Passionate about carving historic canoes, Dave finds that it to be a practice that connects his culture and builds community. But all of the fallen old growth trees are now protected in parks, and for many years they have not had the resources to carve even just one canoe a year -- until now.

MARGO ROBBINS *Executive Director, Cultural Fire Council (Yurok)*

Margo's work aims to "bring fire back to the land in a good way," including the practice of prescribed burns long used by Native people. She explains the ecological benefits of fire and how it can be used to mitigate the devastating wildfires caused by more than a century of fire suppression.

LAURIE A. WAYBURN *Founder, Pacific Forest Trust*

Laurie guides us through the series of events that lead to the logging of 95% of the original redwood forest. Her family was instrumental in the creation of Redwood National Park, which gave her a front row seat to the battles between loggers and environmentalists in the 60s, 70s and beyond. *In her current work, Laurie helps private land-owners create pathways to steward and protect active timberlands.

EMILY BURNS *Former Director of Science, Save the Redwoods League*

A key player in the initiative to map the redwood genome, Emily explains how genetic knowledge could lead to better ways of fortifying future forests. Her organization has also supported key efforts such as studying the redwoods' relationship to fog, measuring their ability to capture carbon, and the ambitious plan to restore and reconnect Redwood National and State Parks (Redwoods Rising).

FILMMAKING TEAM

Producer, Director & Writer

LISA LANDERS

[Tangent Productions](#)



For more than two decades, Lisa has been developing and creating award-winning programs for television and museums. Her work has been featured on the Smithsonian Channel, PBS/KQED, National Geographic Television, Discovery, at the American Museum of Natural History and Mexico City's Papalote Museo del Niño, among other venues. She's traveled the world covering diverse subjects ranging from Nile crocodiles to aerial dancing, and crafting multimedia experiences that engage diverse audiences. She's most passionate about telling stories that spark connections with the natural world -- and with each other. Lisa lives, works and finds inspiration among the coast redwoods of northern California and the Andean oaks of Bogotá, Colombia.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The sense of awe and connection to nature that I feel when among redwoods is unparalleled. I'm not alone. My personal experience is a testament to what social scientists have now confirmed: spending time among forests like these can change how we feel, how we see ourselves and how we interact with the world. It can make us happier, healthier, more compassionate and more collaborative. These ancient giants are also a gateway to accessing a deeper sense of connection to ALL trees and forests – and understanding why it's in our best interest to take care of them.

IN CONVERSATION WITH LISA LANDERS

Do you have a personal connection to redwoods that led to the making of this film?

I'm a native New Yorker who first experienced the redwoods on a trip to California as a kid. The redwoods blew me away, making an indelible impression that eventually led me to make my home among these forests. Over the years I have covered many stories about nature, but my awe of the redwoods continued to draw me in like no other natural wonder. They also offered me an indescribable sense of comfort over the past decade, including as I navigated a cancer diagnosis during the production process. I really wanted to immerse audiences in redwoods, with hope of sharing the magic of the redwoods with those who may never have an opportunity to experience them. I also wanted to know more about why redwoods make so many of us feel this way and about the inner-workings of the trees themselves. This film was a perfect excuse to talk to experts and ask these questions. And of course, to spend more time among redwoods myself.

The film covers redwoods from multiple angles, why did you choose to craft the narrative this way?

Most documentaries and news reports about redwoods only cover the trees' tale in fragments. Some are focused on wildlife, others on efforts to protect redwoods – or threats posed by climate change. But there was no single portrait that provided the larger context of the redwoods' story, weaving together the science, culture and history of these extraordinary forests. And there was nothing that explored why redwoods spark such intense awe, moving people so deeply. So I set out to make a film that explore the trees from some of these different angles, offering audiences multiple avenues to connect with the awe that these trees inspire. In presenting the narrative as a tapestry of stories, it also echoes the way in which the redwoods themselves depend on their many interconnections – and acknowledges that the human story is deeply intertwined with theirs.

What do you hope people walk away with after seeing this film?

There are three things that I hope people take away from this film. Firstly, I want them to experience some of that perspective shifting awe that I feel when I'm among redwoods. Secondly, I want to cultivate a fascination for redwoods that will help drive more support for their protection and restoration. And last, but not least, I hope to cultivate an appreciation for all trees so that people are inspired to help preserve them. In joining forces with trees and with each other, we hold the power to make life on this planet a little better for all of us.

NARRATOR



MICHAEL FRANTI

michaelfranti.com

Michael Franti is a globally recognized musician, activist and award-winning filmmaker revered for his high-energy live shows, inspiring music, worldwide philanthropic efforts and the power of optimism. Throughout his multi-decade career, Franti has earned three Billboard No. 1's with triumphantly hopeful hits "Sound of Sunshine," "Say Hey (I Love You)" and "I Got You," as well as six Top 30 Hot AC singles, 10 Top 25 AAA Singles and three Billboard Top 5 Rock Albums. Spearhead's 12th studio album *Follow Your Heart* was released in June 2022 and debuted at No. 2 on the iTunes Pop Chart behind Harry Styles. Franti & Spearhead are gearing up to release their 13th studio album with *Big Big Love* set for November 3, featuring 17 songs, including the title track and lead single currently climbing the Triple A Chart.

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

NORA MCNEELY HURLEY

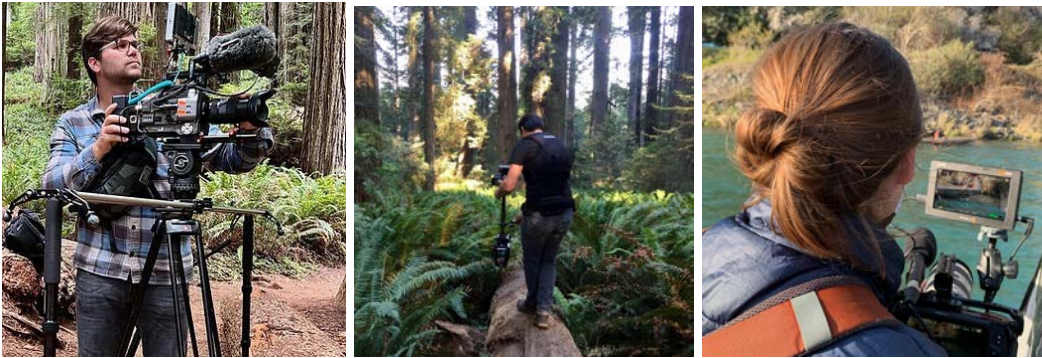
Trustee and Chief Programming Director of the charitable family foundation, Manitou Fund, Nora has long been a champion of the environment and the arts. The organization's generous support enabled this film to be brought to life. Nora's on-going support for the social impact campaign and educational resources will allow the team to expand the reach and impact of *Giants Rising*.

FISCAL SPONSOR

THE REDFORD CENTER

Fiscal sponsorship for the film was provided by the Redford Center, an organization established by Robert Redford and his son James to support filmmakers who use the power of storytelling to galvanize environmental justice and regeneration.

KEY PRODUCTION CREW



Cinematography

An experienced team of cinematographers brought their incredible talents to this film. Wielding their full range of expertise, they filmed everything from dazzling drone footage over majestic forests to macro cinematography of scientists extracting DNA from tiny redwood seeds. Key cinematographers included: **Owen Bissell, Fabian Aguirre, Maya Pisciotto, Mike Abela, Randall Love and Richard Neill.**

Editor

DAMON CLAUSSEN

An exceptionally creative editor with a keen sense of pacing and visual impact, for over 25 years Damon has been editing for clients including Warner Bros., DC Comics, CW, HBO, Discovery, TLC, National Geographic, and Smithsonian Channel.

Animators

LITTLE FLUFFY CLOUDS

This award-winning studio specializes in high-end motion graphics and animation in all forms. Talented, imaginative, experimental yet pragmatic, they helped us bring the science of redwoods to life. Their beautiful short film *Yellowstone 88 - Song of Fire* recently took the festival circuit by storm, garnering many awards.

Composer

CODY WESTHEIMER

Cody has scored nearly 50 features and over a hundred hours of television, including many nature-focused documentaries. From soaring IMAX symphonies to his iconic Tour de France theme song (NBC), Cody's passion and emotional sensibility come through in every composition.

Sound Design & Mix

SKYWALKER SOUND

The sounds of the redwood forest were brought to life through the wizardry of Skywalker Sound designers and editors [Kent Sparling](#) (Minari, Pete's Dragon, An Inconvenient Sequel) and [Bjørn Schroeder](#) (Top Gun: Maverick, The Witches, Harry Potter) -- from the crackle of redwood duff below slowly moving feet, to the melodic call of distant owls, to the burst of flames ripping through the forest.

Social Impact Strategist
LINDSAY GUETSCHOW

Lindsay is an impact strategist who brings nearly 20 years of experience building impact strategies and campaigns for films, nonprofits, foundations and philanthropists that drive meaningful and measurable change. The heart of Lindsay's work lies at the intersection of storytelling and social change. Her previous film projects include: An Inconvenient Truth, Waiting for "Superman", ALL IN: The Fight for Democracy, He Named Me Malala, Extrapolations, Fauci, Inside My Heart, TEACH, A Place At The Table, Last Call at the Oasis, Misconception, Ivory Tower, Promised Land, Lincoln, Middle of Nowhere, and UNZIPPED: An Autopsy of American Inequality.