



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **ROARING CAMP REJECTS RTC'S PLAN TO FORCE ABANDONMENT OF RAIL LINE**

*Regional Transportation Commission to consider plan that threatens Roaring Camp rail line, as well as future of rail transportation in Santa Cruz County*

FELTON, CA – JANUARY 19, 2022 – Roaring Camp, Inc. (Roaring Camp), operator of the Santa Cruz, Big Trees & Pacific Railway, today called upon the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) to reject at its Feb. 3, 2022, meeting the hostile attempt proposed by RTC staff to initiate a process that aims to force abandonment of the Felton Branch Rail Line. Forced abandonment of the line, which is wholly owned by Roaring Camp, would remove Roaring Camp's right to utilize the rail line for freight use. Loss of the right to freight use would have a highly negative impact on Roaring Camp's business and would represent the first step in a larger, special interests-fueled effort to end rail service in Santa Cruz County.

Roaring Camp released the following statement from CEO Melani Clark:

"Roaring Camp is strongly opposed to the RTC's proposed action to pursue forced abandonment of the rail line we've owned and operated since 1984 because doing so will seriously harm our local, family-run, women-owned business, and our local economy. The RTC's proposal represents an aggressive attack on our railroad and rail transportation in our county, fueled by special interests that are lobbying hard to end rail in Santa Cruz County. We encourage our community to join Roaring Camp in standing up against this poorly conceived, shortsighted move.

Roaring Camp's diversified business operates in both North County and South County, and includes freight and tourist trains. Forced abandonment of the Felton Branch Rail Line will cause multiple adverse impacts for Roaring Camp, beginning with a permanent end to freight operations, which removes rail service as an option for local businesses.

Roaring Camp is under contract to provide freight service on the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line through an agreement reached with the freight operator in 2021, including in South County where we are currently seeing growth in our services for multiple local industries. However, due to inaction by the RTC to repair two bridges, currently freight service is prevented from running the full distance between Santa Cruz and Watsonville (and beyond). Responsibility for the lack of access to freight services for local businesses north of Watsonville rests with the RTC under its agreement with the freight operator. This unfortunate circumstance is holding back our community in terms of economic development that supports job and income growth, and as an important strategy in the fight against climate change – freight-by-rail accounts for only 2% of greenhouse gas emissions, compared to 24% coming from trucks on roadways, according to the U.S. EPA.

In North County, the threatened loss of Roaring Camp's right to freight service is especially alarming as we look ahead to the rebuilding process in the wake of the CZU Lightning Complex fire that destroyed

approximately 900 homes in the Santa Cruz Mountains. Rail presents a critical advantage as we confront rising materials prices and trucking shortages, with freight rail serving as a dependable, cost-effective and greener alternative. Freight rail also represents a potential tool for our community as we consider how to prepare for future climate-related disasters that may require the need to deliver emergency water and emergency fire-fighting assets to the region.

Roaring Camp's tourist train operations are also threatened by the RTC's forced abandonment plans. Our tourist trains carry approximately 200,000 - 250,000 guests per year (pre-pandemic), with a very large portion of those guests staying in area hotels, contributing to the local economy and tax base. Our beach train operations that run from Felton to the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk remove approximately 9,000 cars off the road during busy summer months. Forced abandonment represents a serious overreach of local government and is a clear threat to our business including the more than 60 permanent employees who work for Roaring Camp, as well as many more seasonal employees.

But make no mistake, the RTC's proposal goes well beyond impacting Roaring Camp; the proposal is clearly part of a larger scheme that will have permanent and deeply negative impacts for our entire county. Should the Felton Line be declared abandoned, Roaring Camp's rail line will be the first domino to fall in a series of moves that would conclude with abandonment of the Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line (SCBRL) that runs the length of Santa Cruz County. Abandonment of the SCBRL will result in the permanent end to any possibility of passenger rail service for Santa Cruz County. The RTC's potential aggressive action against Roaring Camp should serve as a major wake-up call for anyone who is interested in a future that includes both a rail and a trail system for our county. This isn't just about Roaring Camp. It's about our entire community and our future.

The RTC's forced abandonment of the Felton Branch Rail Line also represents a breach of trust and a betrayal of a commitment. Roaring Camp was urged by local elected officials to give up its right of first refusal to purchase the Santa Cruz Branch Rail line from Union Pacific. My family was assured the rail line was an extremely important asset to the county, that the RTC had worked hard to line up funding from the state and that the sale to the RTC was for the benefit of the entire community. Roaring Camp was assured the line would be used for rail, thanks to funding from Proposition 116, which specifically calls for a commitment to rail service. In response, Roaring Camp cleared the way for the RTC to purchase the line. Now, the RTC is targeting Roaring Camp's Felton Branch Rail Line as the first step toward forced abandonment of the full Santa Cruz Branch Rail Line and a betrayal of a commitment made to future rail that was made to Roaring Camp, the people of Santa Cruz County and the State of California.

Roaring Camp has decades of history providing rail service in Santa Cruz County and we continue to be devoted to delivering quality transportation and recreation opportunities for local residents and businesses, as well as visitors. We look forward to engaging with our community in the fight to stop the RTC's attempt to force abandonment of the Felton Branch Rail Line."

#### **ABOUT ROARING CAMP, INC.**

Incorporated in 1958, privately held Roaring Camp, Inc. (Roaring Camp) operates two railroads, including the Redwood Forest Steam Train and the Santa Cruz Big Trees & Pacific Railway. Roaring Camp also owns the historic Felton Branch Rail Line, which is eight miles long and runs across a 1909 steel truss bridge and passes through a tunnel in Santa Cruz that was built in 1875. Norman Clark founded Roaring Camp and ran the business until his passing in 1985, after which his wife, Georgiana assumed ownership and management responsibilities. She was succeeded as CEO by Georgiana and Norman's daughter, Melani Clark. Roaring Camp is a woman-owned business, with majority shareholders that include Melani Clark and her two sisters. Visit [www.roaringcamp.com](http://www.roaringcamp.com) for more information.

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