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Arborist answers call of boosters to save oak

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GLEN ELLEN -- A centuries-old oak tree that provided shade and inspiration to writer and entrepreneur Jack London when he lived in Sonoma County will be allowed to stand for a little longer after lab tests showed it is healthier than California park officials originally thought.

The decaying oak was scheduled to be taken down as a safety precaution last month because it is infected with a fungal disease. Officials at Jack London State Historic Park in Glen Ellen worried that a branch could fall off and injure a visitor or damage the cottage where London lived and wrote from 1905 until his death in 1916.

The end was so close that park rangers hosted several events this year to honor the tree, including a Native American blessing ceremony, a dramatic storytelling and having children harvest its acorns for replanting elsewhere.

But park boosters sought a reprieve, turning to a UC Berkeley expert in forest pathology who concluded that "Jack's Oak" had another 10 to 10 years before it would have to be removed as long as it was beyond

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"We couldn't be more thrilled," said Jack London Park Partners executive director Tjiska Van Wyk, whose group manages the 39-acre property that includes the cottage as well as the 50-foot-tall tree that was destroyed by fire in 1913. "In the season of joy, we consider this a

To protect the public and the cottage, the park has instituted new parking restrictions and plans to inspect and prune it regularly.

"We're not out of the woods. We're in a gray area where the risk needs to be managed," said Garbelotto, the Berkeley adjunct associate professor who conducted the most recent study.

The 50-foot-tall, 350- to 400-year-old tree sits on what's known as Jack London's "The Call of the Wild" property "The Call of the Wild" author bought in 1905 to be close to nature. The oak from the window by his desk in the cottage and drew inspiration for his later work, California State Parks senior state archaeologist E. Breck Parkman said.

"I think everyone is going to be pleased that this tree has a little more time,"

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