

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

# OPEN SPACE VIEWS

Celebrating 35 Years of Open Space Preservation

## Preserving Natural Resources

### Bugs, Burns, and Fists Used in Fight Against Invasive Weeds

Invasive weeds are a global concern because they displace native plants and wildlife, increase wildfire risk, consume available water, degrade recreational opportunities, and destroy productive range and timber lands. And their economic impacts are staggering: According to a California Interagency Noxious Weed Coordinating Committee study in 2000, invasive weeds cost the United States over \$34 billion a year.

Invasive weeds are also a local concern. The non-native, invasive grasses flourishing beneath redwoods or proliferating across grassland hillsides on the Peninsula may look harmless – even pretty – but for the District, the weeds pose a serious threat to local ecosystems. Using an array of control and eradication methods, the District is aggressively fighting infestations of invasive weeds, including slender false brome (*Brachypodium sylvaticum*), yellow starthistle (*Centaurea solstitialis*), and Harding grass (*Phalaris aquatica*).

Slender false brome, a relatively new invasive grass, can be found in only two areas in the entire United States. Already claiming over 10,000 acres in Oregon,



Yellow Starthistle Hairy Weevil, *Eustenopus villosus*

Photo courtesy of Noah Portiz

it was discovered three years ago in Woodside, California and Thornewood Open Space Preserve. The grass threatens redwood forest ecosystems because of its ability to dominate the forest understory, excluding all other plants, including tree seedlings.

Over the last three years, the District removed 40 acres – about 90% – of slender false brome from Thornewood Preserve. Over the course of this next fiscal year, the District will also begin working with private property owners to remove the weed from surrounding areas. To prevent any further spread, the District aims for complete eradication of the weed within ten years.

To combat the spread of yellow starthistle – which has more than doubled in the last 20 years and claimed an estimated 15 to 20 million acres in California – the District uses hairy weevils (*Eustenopus villosus*) an insect native to Greece and a natural enemy of the weed. The adult weevils feed on developing buds while their larvae feast from within on immature seeds, thereby

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### Public Opinion Survey Findings

Earlier this year, the District contracted with Godbe Research to conduct a Public Opinion Survey and follow-up focus groups to capture the opinions of District residents on a variety of subjects. The District had previously conducted similar polls of its constituents in 1993 and 1998. Since then significant changes have occurred, including approval of the District's Coastside Protection Program, which expanded the District's jurisdictional boundary to the San Mateo County coast, and the District's increased focus on managing its lands and related resources.

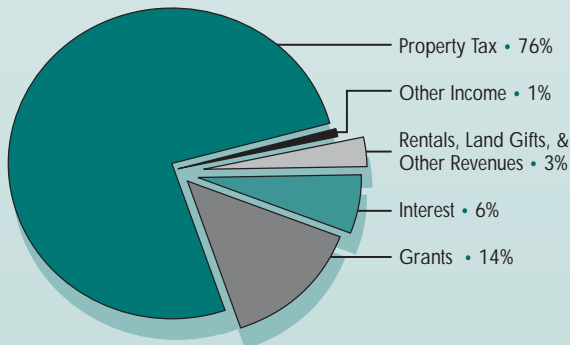
The goal of the Public Opinion Survey was to objectively measure how much people know about the management of open space lands, how important preserving natural areas is to them, and how the public uses the preserves for recreation. To that end 600 people (200 residents, 400 registered voters) within the District's boundary were surveyed over a five-day period in March 2007. The Survey also evaluated constituents' opinions on open space land purchases, their familiarity with resource management terminology and practices, including protecting endangered species and fighting invasive plant and animal species, and their opinions on a potential future funding measure.

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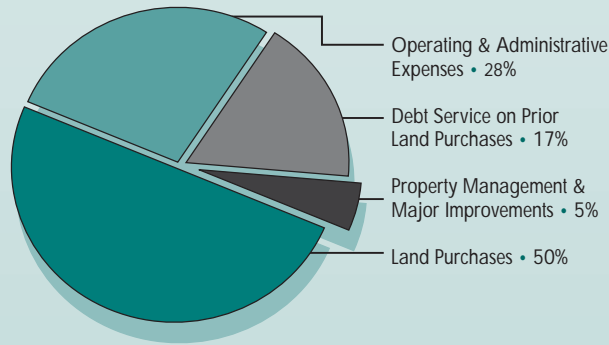


Prescribed Burn at Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve

# The Overall Financial Health of the District Remains Strong and Stable



**Total Revenues: \$31.527 million**



**Total Expenses: \$38.107 million\***

\*The District's annual expenses exceed borrowed funds are used to purchase land. The amounts noted on this page are rounded. For a copy of the audited financial report, please contact the District office.

The District pursued opportunities to purchase new land at reasonable (fair market) values and purchased 5,006 acres of open space land this year for a record fair market value of \$41.6 million. For these land purchases, the District used \$5.87 million in grant and park funding and received gifts in property valued at over \$22.4 million.

The most significant outside financial event for the District in 2007 was the end of the State imposed property tax shift from local governments to state-funded programs. The District's loss of \$3.47 million of its scheduled property tax revenues over three fiscal years ended June 30, 2006. Actual property tax revenues increased by 18.6% due to the end of this tax shift to the State.

The District purchased the 3,681-acre POST/ Driscoll Ranch addition to La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve having a fair market value of \$25,455,000 for a bargain sale purchase price of \$9,000,000 with a gift value of \$16,455,000. The grants received included \$500,000 from the Habitat Conservation Fund (HCF) and \$1,250,000 from the Per Capita Program under the Proposition 40 Bond Act of 2002 for the purchase of the 184-acre POST/Forde property addition to Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve. The 53-acre Peery property was purchased with a HCF grant of \$325,000 also as an addition to Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve. The 238-acre POST/Stevens Canyon Ranch property addition to Saratoga Gap included \$3,340,318 in grants: \$1,600,000 from the Santa Clara Valley Water District; \$1,240,318 from the Roberti-



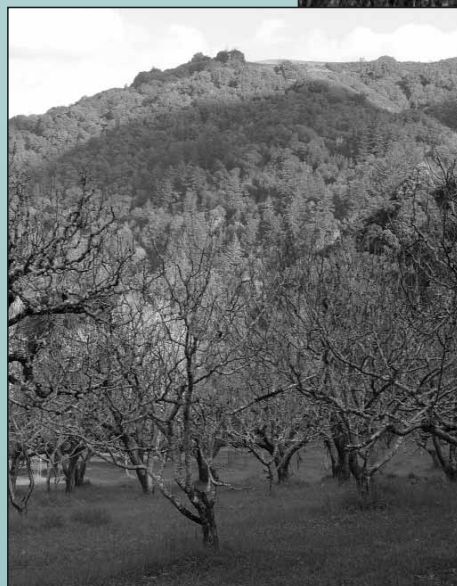
(POST/Forde Property)  
Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve

The District received \$23.9 million in tax revenues, which represented 76% of the District's total income. Tax revenue growth, before subtractions for the State imposed property tax shift, continued to be above average in fiscal 2006-2007, at about 9.2%, compared to 8.5% in fiscal 2005-2006. Other revenue sources included grants received

(\$4.3 million), donations (\$249,495), investment income (\$2.06 million), and revenue from rentals and leases (\$837,248).

Committed to a cautious approach in spending, actual expenditures were approximately 6.2% less than what were budgeted, spending \$10.6 million for operational and administrative costs and \$1.7 million for capital outlays (vehicles, equipment, infrastructure improvements, and construction in process). The cost of debt service payments on the District's principal and interest for previous land purchase was \$6.6 million. Debt service and land purchases made up 67% of total expenditures.

In January 2007, the District completed the sale of \$59.2 million of its 2007 Revenue Bonds, which were sold with an average life of 13.4 years and a total interest cost of 4.41%. These bonds refinanced the 1996 and 1999 (second issue) Revenue Bonds. The present value savings of the 2007 Revenue Bond sale was approximately \$6.2 million, or 10.5% of the refunded debt.



(POST/Stevens Canyon Ranch Property)  
Saratoga Gap Open Space Preserve

Z'Berg Harris Block Grant Program under the Proposition 40 Bond Act of 2002; and \$500,000 from the California Coastal Conservancy San Francisco Bay Conservancy Program. The 708-acre POST/Tunitas Creek Ranch, creating the Tunitas Creek Open Space Preserve, was purchased with a HCF grant of \$462,500 and a land value gift of \$3,782,500. The District continued to seek and obtain additional grant funding and commitments for future grants, adding \$500,000 from the HCF for the purchase of the POST/Madonna Creek property as an addition to Mills Creek Open Space Preserve.

## Changing of the Greenbelt Guard

After 30 years of service for the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, I'm announcing my retirement from the District in March 2008. The Board of Directors accepted my resignation from the position of General Manager, and has initiated a search for a replacement with the recent hiring of an executive search firm. I always had in mind that the District would have 60,000 acres preserved before my retirement, but with nearly 56,000 acres protected – and the last 6,000 acres over a two-year period, I've decided now is the time for a change of the greenbelt guard. Although, I will no doubt miss the day-to-day operations necessary to piece together the "greenbelt puzzle."

As the District nears its 35<sup>th</sup> year of open space preservation, the public can look forward to a continued dedication and commitment to the goals that have made the District a success. This past fiscal year, the District continued to focus its efforts on managing land, and related resource and restoration issues. As part of a Public Opinion Survey conducted earlier this year, the importance of preserving natural areas and constituents' familiarity with natural resource management terminology and practices was assessed. (Refer to the *Public Opinion Survey Findings* article beginning on page 1 for a highlight of the survey results.) Focus groups were also formed with interested constituents from the pool of folks surveyed to learn more about the values that underlie people's opinions about natural resource management. District staff has also been working diligently on District Resource Management Policies, including review and development of chapters on Fisheries, Water Quality, Pond Management, Invasive Species, Forest Diseases, Grazing, and Forest Management.

In addition to the subtle shift in direction from a focus on land purchase activities to greater balance with land and resource management, there has also been increased emphasis on a regional "green" vision and managing large tracts of land that connect between other government and land conservation agencies, and land trust and non-profit organizations.



The former Dyer Ranch property, at La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve, with views to the San Mateo Coast, is one of General Manager Craig Britton's favorite places in the District.

For example, the Association of Bay Area Governments and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, in collaboration with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and the Bay Conservation and Development Commission, is currently spearheading the FOCUS initiative – short for Focusing Our Vision. As part of this initiative, local governments are being encouraged to participate by nominating regionally significant areas that have broad community support and an urgent need for protection through purchase or easement within the next few years. This initiative will help identify the region's near-term conservation priorities

and help promote collaboration and investment in areas that are critical to the region's economy, quality of life, and ecological diversity.

Often, a key component of managing large tracts of land is maintaining an awareness of how the land fits into the regional puzzle. The District continues to work toward implementation of some of the proposed regional trail connections that involve District land, including the Bay Area Ridge Trail connection on the east side of Skyline Boulevard that would provide a multi-use trail from the Wunderlich County Park area in Woodside, connecting through the District's Teague Hill Open Space Preserve and Huddart County Park, and up to San Francisco Watershed Lands near Highway 92. The Bay Area Ridge Trail Council and San Mateo County Parks are leading this effort, with the support of the District, the City of San Francisco, and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Another key regional trail connection the District continues to turn its attention to is linking Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve to the sea. This trail would extend through the District's Coastside Protection Program area on the San Mateo Coast, traveling from Purisima Creek Redwoods through Peninsula Open Space Trust's Lobitos Ridge and Blue Brush Canyon properties, continuing to Purisima Farms, and down to the ocean – possibly one day connecting the Bay Area Ridge Trail to the State's California Coastal Trail. The Coastside Protection Program continues to be a priority for the District, as efforts to preserve land on the San Mateo Coast are encouraged and the establishment of a trail system and ranger and staff presence on the coast become closer to reality.

As I complete my tenure with the District in the 2007-2008 fiscal year, I will continue to look for ways to protect District funding and conserve public monetary resources. The District has a traditionally conservative budgetary growth guideline – typically budgeted at 7%. This guideline is both an important planning tool for exercising fiscal constraint, and a means of ensuring that adequate funds are available for land purchase, resource protection, and regional public access improvements. The Board of Directors and my successor will continue to use this growth guideline and conservative approach to spending to ensure open space is available for the preservation, restoration, and enjoyment for all for generations to come.

Sincerely,  
L. Craig Britton



Future Purisima to the Sea Trail Connection

# BIOGRAPHY OF L. CRAIG BRITTON, GENERAL MANAGER

## Education

Attended Claremont Men's College and San Francisco State University.

Earned a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration.

## Résumé

- Marin County Open Space District
- Santa Cruz County
- State of California
- Caltrans

Duties included appraisal, acquisition, and property management.

**District Career:** Craig joined the District in 1977 as Land Acquisition Manager.

In 1979, Craig assumed the duties of Assistant General Manager.

Appointed in March of 1994, Craig has served as the District's General Manager for 13 years.

During his tenure as both Land Acquisition Manager and General Manager, Craig has overseen an increase in District land holdings from approximately 6,000 acres to nearly 56,000 acres (a 933% increase); from 8 open space preserves to 26 (a 325% increase); and from 13 employees to just over 100 (a 769% increase).



L. Craig Britton, General Manager

Velina Gerzsch, Courtesy of Committee for Green Foothills



## Words of Wisdom:

- Craig often jokes that when he came to the District in 1977 as Land Acquisition Manager, the District owned 6,000 acres and had \$12 million in the bank, and now 30 years later, while serving as General Manager, the District owns nearly 56,000 acres and is \$130.2 million in debt. "They aren't making any more land, but they print money every day."
- "We've always worried if we were going to have enough money to purchase land that has become available over time, but the approach has always been that if a window of opportunity was open we tried to jump through it. Former District General Manager Herb Grench coined this for me—he said it was the General Manager's job to raise the money, the Controller's job to account for the money, and the Land Acquisition Manager's job to spend the money."
- "From many places on the Midpeninsula, one can look up and see the foothills, and rest the eyes on open space. And for me, appreciating this visual aspect of open space is using it; I don't necessarily have to touch it to use it." 🌿

Charlote MacDonell

Craig Britton in the Early Years at Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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The District's mission is to acquire and preserve a regional greenbelt of open space land in perpetuity; protect and restore the natural environment; and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education.

## PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY FINDINGS (continued from page 1)

Some of the Public Opinion Survey questions and results are revealed below.

### In general, what do you like to do most during your leisure time?\*

Active outdoor sports or recreational activities	43.7%
Movies, TV, video games	12.1%
Indoor sports or recreational activities	11.0%

### What outdoor leisure activities do you do most frequently?\*

Walking	40.0%
Hiking	13.4%
Biking (road)	8.2%

### What are the names of the open space preserves you go to for your outdoor activity?\*

Rancho San Antonio	11.7%
Windy Hill	6.2%
Bear Creek Redwoods	4.8%

### How often do you visit the open space preserves?\*

Two to three times a month	15.5%
More than once a week	15.3%
Monthly	14.3%

### Please rate the District's performance in the following areas:

Overall job the District is doing	Excellent 13.7%	Good 49.8%
Preserving open space land	Excellent 21.0%	Good 44.6%
Managing natural resources	Excellent 15.1%	Good 45.6%
Overall quality of open space preserves in the District	Excellent 18.3%	Good 49.0%
Providing opportunities for recreation	Excellent 20.7%	Good 47.3%

### The following are the top three activities that are currently being pursued by the District that received the highest ratings.\*

Protect and restore water quality in rivers, lakes, and streams	Extremely important 42.8%	Very important 47.3%
Protecting and restoring the natural environment	Extremely important 32.5%	Very important 52.0%
Managing forests to prevent forest fires	Extremely important 31.7%	Very important 52.3%

\*The top three results are listed.

The Survey has provided valuable information about constituents' impressions of the District and it will greatly help the District make informed decisions, guide the management of open space lands, protect natural resources, and create opportunities for recreation. 🌿

## Master Plan Update

### Open Houses for the La Honda Creek and Sierra Azul/Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve Master Plans

Beginning this fall, the District will be scheduling Open Houses for the La Honda Creek and Sierra Azul/Bear Creek Redwoods Master Plan projects to unveil the draft Master Plans.

Each Open House will provide an opportunity for the public to ask questions prior to the Public Hearings, which will be scheduled approximately one month following each Open House. The District looks forward to presenting the recommendations for each Preserve that incorporate the comprehensive natural and cultural resource information as well as many comments, concerns, and desires raised by the public during the multi-year process.

Please check the project Web sites noted below for confirmed dates. Meeting notices will be mailed to persons on the project mailing lists. If you would like to be added to the mailing lists, please contact Jeannie Buscaglia at (650) 691-1200 or [jbuscaglia@openspace.org](mailto:jbuscaglia@openspace.org).

#### La Honda Creek Master Plan

Web site: [www.openspace.org/plans\\_projects/la\\_honda\\_creek.asp](http://www.openspace.org/plans_projects/la_honda_creek.asp)  
Email: [lahondamasterplan@openspace.org](mailto:lahondamasterplan@openspace.org)

#### Sierra Azul/Bear Creek Redwoods Master Plan

Web site: [www.openspace.org/masterplan](http://www.openspace.org/masterplan)  
Email: [masterplan@openspace.org](mailto:masterplan@openspace.org) 🌿

## Preserving Natural Resources

(continued from page 1)

inhibiting yellow starthistle seed production. Weevils consume between 40–90% of yellow starthistle seed heads, reducing the threat to native plant ecosystems and wildlife because of this invasive weed's enormous water consumption. The yellow starthistle's prickly seed heads degrade forage on range lands and reduce access to recreational areas. In addition, the weed is toxic to horses, causing a fatal neurological disorder called "chewing disease." While the weevils cannot completely eradicate yellow starthistle on their own, they are effective in conjunction with other control methods, including mowing, pulling by hand, and selective herbicide application to curb its spread.

Prescribed burning is part of the District's Grassland Management Implementation Plan. The Plan's objective is the control of dense stands of the invasive, perennial Harding grass, as well as the reduction of heavy thatch and brush accumulation. Re-introducing fire to an ecosystem that naturally requires fire will stimulate growth of wildflowers and native grasses that are being replaced by non-native species and will also eliminate seed production of introduced weeds. The massive, fibrous root systems of native grasses are much better than annual non-natives at holding soil and minimizing erosion. Also, by decreasing the amount of fuel, a prescribed burn can actually reduce fire hazard. This summer, the District in cooperation with the California Department of Forestry (CAL FIRE) successfully conducted a 120-acre prescribed burn at Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve.

With its aggressive fight against invasive weeds, the District hopes to regenerate native plant growth on the preserves and protect the biodiversity of the lands for future generations. 🌿

## Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

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### 2006-2007 Annual Report

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Pull out and save your schedule of fall  
*Outdoor Activities* in open space and . . .

be sure to visit us on our Web site for preserve  
maps, volunteer opportunities, and more.

[www.openspace.org](http://www.openspace.org)

Background graphic page 1, Yellow Starthistle, Moser, L. and D. Crisp. San Francisco Peaks (Coconino National Forest) Weed Management Area Fact Sheet on *Centaurea solstitialis*; Background photo page 15, photo by Mary E. Hale, Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve

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## Enjoy the Bay Area Ridge Trail

### 2nd Ridge Trail "Cruz" September 29, 2007

The Bay Area Ridge Trail Council (BARTC) will again host an event in collaboration with the District to celebrate the successful partnership of the two organizations. With over 30 miles of multi-use trail dedicated as part of the Ridge Trail, the District is a key partner in the 300 miles of Ridge Trail completed so far. This event is an opportunity to explore sections of the Bay Area Ridge Trail on foot, mountain bike, or horseback on Saturday, September 29, 2007. All participants begin at Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve. Beginning and advanced routes are available. A \$40 registration fee is charged through BARTC and covers food, water, guides, and the shuttle for hikers. Volunteers from the District, the Bay Area Ridge Trail, REI, Responsible Organized Mountain Pedalers (ROMP), and the Equestrian Trail Riders Action Committee (ETRAC) will also help make this event possible. For more information, to volunteer, or to register, visit [www.ridgetrail.org](http://www.ridgetrail.org) or [www.openspace.org](http://www.openspace.org), or call the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council office at (415) 561-2595.



Ridge Trail, Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve

The Bay Area Ridge Trail ultimately will be a 500-mile trail encircling the San Francisco Bay along the ridge tops, open to hikers, equestrians, mountain bicyclists, and outdoor enthusiasts of all types. To date, over 300 miles of trail are permanently dedicated for use by Bay Area residents. 🌿