

La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve Master Plan
Compilation of Common Questions & Answers
Revised June 15, 2009

Note: The District's Board of Directors is holding a series of public hearings to receive public input regarding the Draft La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve Master Plan. No decision to approve any component of the Draft Master Plan has been made. A final decision on such issues as recreational uses, trail locations, staging areas, and other Plan components will be made by the Board of Directors after completion of the environmental review. These Questions and Answers have been prepared by District staff in response to public comments received to date and solely reflect staff's initial assessment of these issues. District staff hopes that the public will find these Questions and Answers helpful as the District planning process continues to eventual final Board decision-making.

MASTER PLAN

1. What are the District's goals, priorities and commitments for this preserve?

The goal of the master plan is to balance the responsibility of protecting the preserve's natural and cultural resources with the desire to expand grazing and provide for public enjoyment of the land. The master plan sets forth a vision for preserving, managing, and enjoying the preserve consistent with:

- The commitments the District made to the Coastside community in its Service Plan, created in 2004 when the District's boundaries were redrawn to include the San Mateo County Coastside.
- District policies
- The mission of the District, which is, "To acquire and preserve in perpetuity open space land and agricultural land of regional significance, protect and restore the natural environment, preserve rural character, encourage viable agricultural use of land resources, and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education."

2. Q: What was the master planning process for this preserve?

The planning process began in 2004 and included extensive data collection, analysis, field work, public outreach, and preparation. In the middle of this process, purchase of the Driscoll Ranch property, which would more than double the total preserve acreage, became a real possibility. The master plan was postponed to allow additional time to incorporate the new property, carry out a thorough evaluation of the Preserve and develop a comprehensive master plan.

3. What is the length of time required to address high priority road and trail treatments?

Of the 144 sites inventoried as part of a road and trail assessment for the Preserve, 21 have been identified as a high treatment priority. The high priority sites on existing roads will be addressed

before the road is made open for public use. Road and trail treatments will therefore be implemented in conjunction with the phased trail system enhancements. The high priority road and trail treatments on the Driscoll Ranch Main Access Road are scheduled for implementation during Phase I (years 0-5). The high priority treatments on the Vista Point Loop Trail, La Honda Creek Loop Trail, and Interior Loop Trail located north of the Red Barn Area are scheduled for implementation during Phase II (years 5- 10). Finally, the high priority treatments on the Redwood Cabin Loop Trail are scheduled for implementation during Phase III (years 10-20). The expected duration of each treatment project is three to five years.

4. What does the Coastside Protection Area Service Plan state with regards to committing services, funds, and staff resources on Coastside properties?

The Service Plan includes two guidelines and two implementation items that address how the District can ensure that its activities within the Coastside Protection Area will not compromise existing services and that sufficient funding will exist before the District takes on any new responsibilities.

Guideline G.1: The District shall only acquire lands or enter into management agreements with other public or non-profit entities where such agreement would not result in any negative significant impact to existing services.

Implementation Action G.1.A(i): Following annexation, the District will work cooperatively with its constituents to develop appropriate District funding measures to augment existing funding sources for land acquisition and management within the Coastal Annexation Area.

Guideline G.2: Prior to making any lands available to public access for low-intensity recreation in the Coastal Annexation Area, the District shall have personnel and equipment available to manage public access such that: there would be no significant negative impact on existing services; and adequate stewardship to protect natural and agricultural resources will be provided by qualified and experienced personnel.

Implementation Action G.2.A(i): The District shall conduct a site assessment prior to entering into any acquisition and/or management agreements to assure that the District shall not undertake any project without sufficient resources to sustain that project.

5. How has the District prioritized projects? Why are public access projects (opening Phase I trails) ranked higher than identifying wildlife corridors? How are road and trail treatments prioritized as compared to opening roads and trails to public access?

Although corridor identification and protection is identified as a low priority within the Draft Master Plan, the District has taken significant actions to protect the most sensitive habitats and wildlife corridors on the property through the creation of the Conservation Management Unit (CMU) within the northwestern corner of the former Driscoll Ranch area of the Preserve. This action precludes public access, protecting these sensitive habitats from any potential impacts from public use facilities. In addition to the corridors connecting the ponds within this CMU, which are protected, the other important corridors are those that connect the Preserve and wildlife to surrounding lands and nearby habitats. These connections need to be studied and evaluated for their conservation priority within the San Gregorio Creek Watershed and larger Santa Cruz Mountains Bioregion to inform future land conservation efforts in this region.

The opening of roads and trails to introduce public access in new areas of the Preserve is a priority for the District, consistent with the District’s mission to “provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education”. Existing road alignments that will be converted to trail use have already been evaluated for potential sediment delivery and those sites with the highest erosion potential are identified as high priority treatment sites. Each new alignment will be opened to public use only after the implementation of priority erosion treatments. These treatments intend to minimize or prevent future erosion and upgrade existing alignments to acceptable District trail standards to appropriately accommodate the level of trail use expected.

RECREATIONAL USE

6. Why are some areas of the preserve closed to public access?

This preserve contains two sensitive areas that merit special protection. In accordance with District policy, such areas can be designated as Conservation Management Units (CMUs) to be managed primarily for resource protection and conservation. The two CMUs identified in this preserve are:

- The northwestern corner of the former Driscoll Ranch. It provides habitat for the threatened California red-legged frog, which has been observed throughout this area. A complex of ponds offers one of the highest quality frog habitats on District-owned lands. This site may also contain endangered San Francisco garter snakes.
- The northeastern portion of the preserve that was extensively logged prior to District ownership. The remnant logging roads are in poor condition, were built on highly erosive Butano sandstone and may be a source of sediment in the San Gregorio Creek watershed, which is listed as “sediment-siltation impaired” under the Clean Water Act. This area is being targeted for watershed restoration efforts.

7. After the master plan is adopted, how soon would new trails be open to the public? Will the current trails remain open?

The master plan identifies new trails, parking areas, and trail amenities that will be phased in over 30 years as funding and staff resources allow. The 5.6-mile Driscoll Ranch main access road is slated to be open to public use within five years after adoption of the master plan. Additional new trails will increase total trail mileage from the current 3.7 miles to nearly 30 miles. The current trail system and any future trails will remain open as the master plan is implemented, unless closures are necessary for safety reasons or to facilitate new trail construction.

8. Would the District consider making amendments to the master plan in the future?

The master plan has been developed based on a number of assumptions about the future, including recreational trends, environmental and financial conditions. The master plan is designed to be flexible so that future conditions can be addressed as they arise. With this in mind, the District expects to review the master plan in 10 to 15 years to determine if its goals are being implemented successfully and if changes are needed. Assuming sufficient funds and staff resources are available, the full vision for the preserve will be completed within 30 years.

9. Will there be any overnight camping?

Given that this preserve lies partially within the Coastside Protection Area, the master plan must remain consistent with the Coastside Service Plan, which prohibits camping. However, the

Redwood Cabin, which lies outside the Coastside Protection Area, may be considered for overnight use depending on the results of the structural and historical assessment.

10. Does the master plan identify ADA accessible trails or facilities?

Several easy access trails have been identified for the preserve. They will have a gentle grade, be readily accessible from parking areas, and have smooth surfaces to accommodate a diversity of trail users. The master plan identifies the existing 0.9-mile loop trail off Allen Road and trails in the Red Barn area as easy access trails. ADA parking, accessible restrooms, and picnic tables are also planned.

11. How did the master plan incorporate public input from the bicycling community?

Throughout the master planning process input from the general public, including members of the bicycling community, was solicited through workshops, email, letters interviews and stakeholder meetings. In response to comments from the bicycling community, the Ad Hoc Committee, made up of three board members, asked staff to re-evaluate the original recommendation for bicycle access. This led to the development of the two trail use options now under board consideration, each offering greater opportunities for bicycle access than the original proposal.

12. Why not allow bicycle access along the entire Driscoll Ranch main access road? Why not open more single-track trails, additional loops, access to Ray's Peak and a greater variety of trails to bicycles?

The District must carefully balance the needs of all its user groups. In 2000, long before this master plan, the Board of Directors amended this preserve's Use and Management Plan, calling for the La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve to be one of seven reserved for hiking and equestrian use to provide some areas on District land where potential use conflicts could be avoided. The amendment also changed the District's approach to trail use designations, moving away from a trail by trail review to looking at larger areas and preserves as a whole, allowing for better visitor understanding, compliance and simplified enforcement. With this in mind, staff does not recommend extending bicycle use onto the remainder of the Driscoll Ranch main access road given that hiking/equestrian loop trails intersect the main access road in this area.

The trail to Ray's Peak will be a short, narrow, up and back trail. Given the steep topography and the one-way nature of the trail, mountain bicycling is not recommended to avoid user conflicts on downhill, narrow trails.

The master planning process for La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve provided an opportunity to reconsider how the Use and Management Plan amendment is applied, particularly related to bicycle use. The Board of Directors is currently considering two public use options that reflect the intent of the use and management decisions while still providing for bicycle access.

13. Does the master plan offer bicycle access to the children of La Honda Elementary School?

Yes, both options provide bicycle access for children attending the local elementary school. Under Option 1, adults can become District docents who would lead school or family bicycle rides through the preserve. Alternatively, Option 2 would allow children the opportunity to ride a network of trails, including a loop trail within the former Driscoll Ranch, with their family or school groups.

14. Why not open the preserve to bicycles on alternate days or weekdays?

The District has not had success with similar limited use techniques in the past (walk only and one-way travel zones) and feels strongly that opening trails to specific uses on alternate days is difficult for users to be informed about and remember and for patrol staff to enforce. The District aims to simplify trail use rules.

15. How will the needs of bicyclists living in the Allen Road/Skylonda area be addressed?

Residents from the Allen Road, Skylonda, and surroundings neighborhoods will continue to have access to the more than 35 miles of multi-use trails at El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve, located less than two miles from these residential areas.

16. Why not allow more access, including off-leash access, for dogs?

Due to District-wide poor leash law compliance, the existing cattle grazing operation, and tenant residences on the preserve, on-leash dog access is proposed on specific trails. Seasonal closures may be necessary to avoid impacts on existing and future grazing operations, particularly any that include cow-calf pairs.

17. Is it possible to construct all of the proposed new trails at one time under one contract?

The District recognizes the strong interest of some of its constituents to open as many of the new proposed trails in the Preserve as early as possible. However, the District must balance the goal of providing greater public access with other critical goals for the Preserve, including protection of sensitive habitat, watershed quality, wildlife, cultural resources, and the expansion of conservation grazing. Costs to complete all Draft Master Plan projects over a 30 year period are estimated to be between \$8.1 and \$10.3 Million (in 2007 dollars). With such a high total estimated expense and given other priority projects located at the District's 25 other open space preserves, projects would need to be prioritized and implementation phased over a 30 year horizon. Moreover, it is the District's experience that large trail projects individually span a 3-5 year schedule to allow sufficient time for design, development of construction plans, environmental review, permitting, securing of grants, bidding, and construction.

18. Why not construct the Ridge Trail alignment during Phase I?

The alignment that requires immediate attention from the District is the Driscoll Ranch main access road since it is currently in use by the grazing tenant and serves as the access road for four ranch residences. Numerous high and moderate priority road treatments have been identified for this 5.6-mile section of ranch road to reduce potential sediment delivery to a watershed that supports fisheries. Given the District's experience with road work and the need for multiple permits, these high and moderate-priority road treatments are expected to require 3-5 years to complete. Given limited resources, we do not expect the capacity to begin pursuing additional trail work until Phase II, which is when we plan to focus on the proposed Ridge Trail.

19. If a multiple-use regional trail were made available to the coast, would the District consider opening the entire Driscoll Ranch main access road to multiple-use?

The Master Plan has been developed based on a number of assumptions about the future, including recreational trends, and both environmental and financial conditions. The master plan is designed to be flexible so that future conditions can be addressed as they arise. With this in mind, the District expects to review the master plan in 10 to 15 years to determine if its goals are being implemented successfully and if changes are needed. Should a new multiple-use regional trail out to the coast be made available in the future, the District would have the opportunity to consider amending the trail use decisions for this road as part of the future periodic review of the Master Plan.

20. What remains to be done to dedicate a regional trail out to the coast that would connect to La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve?

Multiple private parcels lie between La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve and the coastline. The nearest public open space land in this direction is San Gregorio State Beach – located approximately 5.3 miles from the Preserve. Members of the public would be required to travel along the lower stretch of Highway 84 in order to reach this State Beach and the coastline.

Since no alternative trails exist in this area, bicyclists who are motivated to reach the coastline would have no option but to travel along the narrow shoulders of Highway 84. It is worth noting that this lower stretch of Highway 84 is much less steep, with softer curves and greater lines of sight as compared to the upper stretch.

21. How does the District envision making the connection between La Honda Creek and El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserves?

The District aims to continue working with surrounding neighbors and property owners in the Bear Gulch area to secure trail easements and/or purchase properties to establish a trail connection between the two Preserves. Bear Gulch Road itself is not considered a suitable trail corridor since this road is too narrow and winding, with limited line of sight, steep side slopes, and no roadside shoulders to allow trail users to safely step off the road when necessary. Therefore, a dedicated trail that connects the two properties is needed.

22. Would the District consider making the Sears Ranch Road parking area accessible to horse trailers?

The Sears Ranch Road parking area will be designed to encroach as little as possible into one of the more productive pastures in the entire ranch area. For this reason, the proposed parking area is notably small (10-20 vehicles). No horse trailers are proposed to keep the footprint as small as possible (horse trailers require a much larger parking space and sufficient space for turnarounds). Instead, the Draft Master Plan identifies two other parking areas that can accommodate 3-6 horse trailers each. One will be located adjacent to the Red Barn and the second near the Driscoll Ranch West Gate.

23. Is the Draft Master Plan consistent with the Allen Road access agreement between the District and Allen Road neighbors?

Yes. The access agreement requires visitors who drive into the Preserve via the Allen Road to first secure a permit; this agreement limits access to no more than 20 vehicles each day. Also, no hiking or riding is allowed on Allen Road to reach the Preserve, visitors are instead required to drive in and park at the permitted parking area. In accordance with this agreement, the Draft Master Plan continues to limit vehicles access by visitors to no more than 10 cars each day via a permitted system

that is administered by the District. As is currently the case, visitors who receive the permit will be given the combination to open the locked gate at the end of Allen Road to obtain access to the permit parking area. It is worth noting that bicycles are not allowed on the trails that connect to the Allen Road entrance. The only proposed change in trail use in this area is the introduction of dogs on leash following the reintroduction of grazing in these upper grassland areas.

24. Why not allow bicycle access along the entire Driscoll Ranch main access road? Why not open more single-track trails, additional loops, access to Ray's Peak and a greater variety of trails to bicycles?

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25. How will the District address the needs of bicyclists living in the Allen Road/Skylonda area?

Residents from the Allen Road, Skylonda, and surroundings neighborhoods will continue to have access to the more than 35 miles of multi-use trails at El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve, located less than two miles from these residential areas.

26. Would the District consider alternate days or weekday access for bicycles? Would the District consider uphill only access for bicycles?

The District has not had success with similar limited use techniques in the past (walk only and one-way travel zones) and feels strongly that opening trails to specific uses on alternate days is difficult for users to be informed about and remember and for patrol staff to enforce. The District aims to simplify trail use rules.

The alignment that requires immediate attention from the District is the Driscoll Ranch main access road since it is currently in use by the grazing tenant and serves as the access road for four ranch residences. Numerous high and moderate priority road treatments have been identified for this 5.6-mile section of ranch road to reduce potential sediment delivery to a watershed that supports fisheries. Given the District's experience with road work and the need for multiple permits, these high and moderate-priority road treatments are expected to require 3-5 years to complete. Given limited resources, we do not expect the capacity to begin pursuing additional trail work until Phase II, which is when we plan to focus on the proposed Ridge Trail.

NATURAL RESOURCES

27. How will you manage the Preserve to prevent fires?

The master plan contains a chapter on Fire and Fuels Management outlining measures the District will take to reduce the risk and severity of wildland fire. Projects include fuel breaks, expanded grazing, emergency vehicle access, and the creation of a wildland fire response plan in coordination with fire agencies.

28. How is the Master Plan addressing setbacks/buffers for wetlands and riparian corridors?

Appendix G of the Draft Master Plan establishes the Design Guidelines for Trails and Public Access Facilities, which are consistent with the Coastside Protection Area Service Plan. Setbacks from wetlands are 50 feet for trails, and 150 feet from streams for equestrian trails. Additional restrictions are required where “any trail alignment might affect sensitive biological resources”, in these cases, “the District will consult with the appropriate Resource Agencies.”

An example of this trail design guideline in practice is the current evaluation of a connector trail from Driscoll Ranch to the Red Barn area. Because of concerns regarding potential impacts to sensitive species from this trail alignment and the possibility of designating this trail for multiple-use (includes bicycles), the District is consulting with biologists and the US Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Game regarding this proposed trail prior to opening this trail alignment to public use.

GRAZING

29. Can people, horses, dogs and cattle all get along on this preserve?

Unleashed dogs and gates left open are common issues when recreational uses and cattle ranches are integrated. Also, cattle can be startled by visitors or dogs. The most significant concern for cattle and people when sharing a preserve is physical injury. To successfully integrate public use within grazing, as other Bay Area agencies do, the District will implement best management practices including communicating safety and etiquette information through signage, newsletter articles, brochures and docent led tours; realigning trail segments away from popular cattle resting areas and ranching facilities; relocating troughs and other ranching facilities away from public access areas; installing wildlife-friendly fencing, recreational stiles and self-closing gates. The potential transmission of pathogens between people and livestock is extremely low because the cattle are mostly adults, are not closely confined, and have very limited access to creeks.

30. How does cattle grazing benefit the land?

The settlement of the western United States brought dramatic change to California grasslands, primarily as a result of tilling for agriculture, reduction of native grazing animals, and introduction of cattle. The introduction of non-native plants and animals, coupled with the suppression of fire resulted in native grasslands being virtually replaced by non-native plants, which tend to dominate and replace existing native grasses and wildflowers.

The District carefully manages a sustainable grazing program for the health of the grassland, while protecting sensitive areas including riparian corridors, stream and creeks. Cattle grazing helps remove a portion of the plant material produced each year by grasslands. By consuming plant

material, cattle create openings in the soil beneficial to plants that thrive with greater amounts of sunlight. Plants that benefit from grazing include many types of wildflowers and native California grasses. The health of these plants is affected by the frequency and intensity of the grazing. Although not all native plants favor grazing, the overall diversity and productivity of California annual grasslands is higher in properly grazed environments.