



MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT

LA HONDA CREEK OPEN SPACE PRESERVE MASTER PLAN PROJECT

Public Workshop #3: Driscoll Ranch

Meeting Summary

This meeting summary briefly describes the workshop presentation and the themes from the breakout group sessions held during the La Honda Creek Master Plan Project Public Workshop #3 on November 16th, 2006.

Introduction

On November 16th 2006, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (MROSD) held a community workshop at the La Honda Elementary School to incorporate the recently purchased Driscoll Ranch property into the La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve Master Plan. With the addition of Driscoll Ranch, the La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve will encompass over 5,800 acres of land, becoming the District's largest preserve in San Mateo County. The Master Plan will define the long-term vision for public use and access to the Preserve and will provide management guidelines for the Preserve's natural resources and public access facilities. The workshop covered topics addressed at the first two workshops, as well as other key issues on Driscoll Ranch, such as the ongoing ranching operations, public parking and staging area locations, and the protection and enhancement of endangered species habitat. Approximately 50 people attended the workshop to provide input for the planning process. The final Master Plan and appropriate environmental documentation that will meet California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requirements are targeted for completion in Summer/Fall 2007, with adoption in Winter 2008.

Workshop Overview

Welcome Remarks and Introduction

Following the sign-in of workshop participants, Ana Ruiz, the Project Planner with MROSD, opened the meeting by welcoming the attendees and giving a short presentation. In her presentation, Ruiz provided an overview of the Master Plan purpose, which aims to provide the public with greater opportunities for low-intensity recreational access, interpretation, and education, while protecting the natural, cultural and historic resources of the area. Ruiz went on to discuss the addition of the Driscoll Ranch property with the Open Space Preserve and then introduced the Committee and project team consisting of District and Planning Consultant (DC&E) staff, who are assisting with workshop facilitation and the preparation of the Master Plan.

Master Plan Process and Schedule

The Master Plan process for the La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve began with two public workshops in the fall and winter of 2004. These workshops obtained public input on important aspects related to the management and public use of the Preserve. In spring 2005, the District began negotiations with Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) to acquire Driscoll Ranch, located just southwest of the Preserve. The required time to obtain this property delayed the planning process. However, it was felt that it was more important to incorporate Driscoll Ranch into the Master Plan as the lands together created one contiguous Preserve. Following the Workshop #3: Driscoll Ranch, which focused on issues and opportunities for the Master Plan, the District expects to develop a Draft Plan with a few alternative components, which will be presented at a public workshop to be held in the late summer of 2007. During the fall and winter of 2007-2008, the Draft Revised Plan will be prepared and the first Public Hearing held. The Final Plan and Environmental Review is

Our Mission

"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."

expected to be completed by early 2008, when a second Public Hearing and Plan Adoption are also scheduled to take place.

In addition to public workshops, the District and Planning Consultant (DC&E) are conducting additional public outreach in the form of stakeholder interviews, public land tours and stakeholder focus group meetings.

Driscoll Ranch Introduction

Kirk Lenington, Resource Planner with the District, presented an introduction on Driscoll Ranch. Driscoll Ranch is a working ranch of over 3,700 acres located to the south of upper La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve. The property boasts expansive grasslands, important wildlife habitat and spectacular coastal views. It also poses unique circumstances to public access with respect to the planning process. These include the existence of a 50-year cattle operation lease with the former owner Rudy Driscoll, privacy issues for tenants who remain on the site, and the presence of hydrocarbons in the soil from former oil exploration activities.

Planning Issues to Consider

The District continued its presentation by summarizing public feedback received thus far during the planning process, including information obtained from the first two workshops held in 2004. Opportunities and challenges for public access were shared and topics of discussion for the current workshop were outlined.

Small Break-out Group Summary

Workshop participants broke up into five groups to review and discuss options on how to incorporate Driscoll Ranch into the Master Plan process. Using maps of the Preserve to guide the discussion, participants were asked to answer questions regarding trail use (dogs on leash, hiking, biking and equestrian access), staging areas, grazing issues, and protection of sensitive resources. As with the previous two workshops, each group was led by a trained facilitator from the consultant team or the District. Facilitators recorded their group's suggestions and questions on large sheets of paper. After 1 hour of small group discussion, participants reconvened as a large group and heard five "reports back" by one spokesperson selected from each group.

Several themes emerged from each group, which are described in detail below. Major topics included trails use, grazing, education, sensitive resources, preserve access, parking, and fire risk.

Trails

All groups expressed a desire for multiple-use trails that accommodated hikers, bicyclists, equestrians and dogs. The sentiment was that legitimate access for all uses was necessary to prevent illegitimate use in inappropriate areas. However, the importance of safety was mentioned by all groups in regards to multiple-use trails. Concerns were raised over interactions between horses, bicycles and dogs; many expressed the need to design trails that help prevent user conflicts. Possible suggestions for safety considerations included signage and clear line of sight in trail design so that blind corners are minimized. The many wide existing roads on Driscoll Ranch seemed ideal to accommodate multiple-use access. A desire for a variety of trail types that allow specific uses, such as single-track trails for hiking only, was also indicated. Other suggestions regarding safety included limiting bicyclists on steep trails to uphill travel only and timing different uses to avoid conflicts caused by various user types being on the same trails at the same time.

An extensive trail network with temporary closures when necessary was preferred over restricted access to a few trails with heavy use. Many groups expressed a desire for loop trails within the Preserve, as opposed to trails that passed through the property, which would necessitate equestrians and bicyclists to drop off and pick up horses and bicycles, respectively, at two different areas. Loop trails facilitate use by those who rely on parking for access by allowing people to return to their parking origin. In addition to trails along the ridge tops and in open grassy areas, other trails in riparian

areas were requested if they could be managed to prevent resource damage. Several groups mentioned the desire for trail access to Ray's Peak. Other sentiments expressed included having bicycle access through Driscoll Ranch including the southern areas where the topography is flatter and easier to ride so that bicyclists could avoid Highway 84, which has high traffic speeds. Regional connections were supported, especially those that permitted "skyline to the sea" access. The following adjacent areas were mentioned multiple times for possible connections to the Preserve:

- El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve
- Sam McDonald County Park
- Windy Hill Open Space Preserve
- Wunderlich County Park
- Mindego Hill
- Elkus Ranch
- Long Ridge Open Space Preserve
- Portola Redwoods State Park
- Pescadero Creek County Park

Grazing

All groups supported the activity of grazing on the property, but a number of questions were raised about the details of the cattle and grazing management operation. These questions asked about the number of cows, where they would be located and when, how they would be rotated throughout the property, what role they played in fire management, how were dead cows dealt with, and if other ruminant species such as elk could be considered for a role in land management practices. How cattle would respond to interactions with people, horses, bikes and dogs was not well understood by the groups, and it was suggested that Rudy Driscoll's input should be obtained on these matters to inform the planning process. Other suggestions included the use of spring gates, similar to those found in Marin County, and that cattle could be limited from accessing certain areas to protect sensitive resources such as riparian areas and native plant habitat. Timing of public access was stressed as important in order to meet the ranch operation needs while limiting conflicts with public use.

Education

All groups supported the opportunity for the public to learn about ranching and grazing operations as well as the history of the site. It was especially stressed as an opportunity for the La Honda Elementary School given its proximity to the Preserve. Groups expressed a number of ideas for different educational programs involving students. These included learning opportunities involving sensitive resources such as steelhead trout, native plants, and streams in addition to curriculum surrounding ranching activities as well as the possibility of an overnight camp experience. General information available to the public could be presented on signage, but it was suggested that signs should be concentrated in already developed areas or in existing structures and not distributed throughout the Preserve. Several groups also suggested other community involvement programs involving stewardship and education about sensitive resources.

Sensitive Resources

Several groups expressed the sentiment that access and use of the property should be balanced with resource management and wildlife protection. Sensitive areas identified included ponds and riparian corridors, which offer habitat to steelhead, turtles and frogs, as well as native plants. There was a concern over possible negative impacts from cattle to water quality and native plants. Suggestions to facilitate protection included creating buffers around important habitat and allowing only seasonal access in sensitive areas. Cultural resources such as the Indian Grinding Stone were also desired to be protected, but more from human threats such as vandalism. Groups also desired to have community participation in the restoration of sensitive resources.

Access

All groups were unanimous to the idea of gaining access to the Preserve as soon as possible. Priority was given for staging areas and trails needing minimal alteration before they could be functional and open to the public over building new facilities.

Other access issues mentioned the development of an ADA-accessible area adjacent to the Red Barn and the possibility of access to hang gliding in the Preserve. Some groups asked whether or not overnight and after-hour use for all user groups was being planned, and what this would mean for safety and patrol of the Preserve. All groups felt that public access should be planned for so that it didn't interfere with ranching activities. It was also expressed that policy regarding public access and activities in the Preserve should be made based on scientific evidence and not conjecture or assumptions.

Dogs

Most groups expressed the desire to have dog access in the Preserve. Generally, on-leash access was felt to be better than no access at all, but the possibility of designating an off-leash area, perhaps adjacent to the Red Barn or in the northern section of the preserve near Highway 35, was strongly encouraged. The example of a dog park in Napa, Alston Park, was given as a successful precedent. Some groups were uncertain about what kind of interaction dogs would have with cattle, so it was suggested that limiting dogs to non-cattle areas would be best. Again, the need for a legitimate area where dogs could run was stressed so that illegitimate use could be deterred. The other suggestion of steeper fines for off-leash offenders was also expressed.

Parking

The flat area adjacent to the Red Barn was identified as a possible staging area. However, concerns were raised over the site's level of service (LOS) and the length of time needed to involve CalTrans to approve the access. The area across from the event center was also identified and given priority because of the minimal amount of alterations needed for it to function as a staging area. In general, establishing many smaller lots to serve a variety of different functions was preferred over one single large lot. There were safety concerns raised by parents about the possibility of a staging area being located near the La Honda Elementary School. However, having some direct access from the Town of La Honda was desirable. Because of safety, the speed of traffic on Highway 84 and the difficulty to see people especially at night, informal parking along the roadside was discouraged. The "bull pen" near Gate LH07 was another possible location identified for parking. The desire to install restroom facilities at parking areas was expressed by several groups.

Finally several groups mentioned a concern for fire safety and support for grazing as a fire management tool.

The workshop ended with an explanation of the next steps (see *Master Plan Process and Schedule* above) and an appreciation from the Project Team and the District for the public interest and ongoing participation in the master plan project.

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