

# NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF A DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

Date: June 11, 2015

To: Agencies and Interested Parties

From: Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

**Subject: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve Plan (includes the Bear Creek Stables Site Plan and Alma College Rehabilitation Plan)**

Review Period: June 11 to July 10, 2015

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (MROSD) is in the process of preparing a Preserve Plan for Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve (Preserve). MROSD will prepare an environmental impact report (EIR) for the Preserve Plan to satisfy the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.) and will serve as the lead agency for CEQA compliance. The purpose of the Preserve Plan is to identify objectives and guide future use and management of low-intensity recreation and the natural and cultural resources at the Preserve.

## PURPOSE OF THIS NOTICE OF PREPARATION/INITIAL STUDY

In accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines (Title 14 California Code of Regulations [CCR] Section 15082), MROSD has prepared this notice of preparation (NOP) to inform agencies and interested parties that an EIR will be prepared for the above-referenced project. The purpose of an NOP is to provide sufficient information about the proposed project and its potential environmental impacts to allow agencies and interested parties the opportunity to provide a meaningful response related to the scope and content of the EIR, including mitigation measures that should be considered and alternatives that should be addressed (14 CCR Section 15082[b]).

## MROSD PURPOSE

MROSD's purpose is to purchase and permanently protect a regional greenbelt of open space lands, preserve and restore wildlife habitat, watersheds, viewsheds, and fragile ecosystems, and provide opportunities for low-intensity recreation and environmental education. MROSD has protected more than 62,000 acres of land and currently manages 26 Open Space Preserves with more than 225 miles of low-intensity recreational trails, including segments of four regional trails. MROSD lands extend from San Carlos in San Mateo County in the north to the unincorporated Santa Clara County area located south of Los Gatos in the south and represent a wide spectrum of habitat communities, including bayside tidal wetlands, grasslands, oak woodlands, riparian corridors, coyote brush scrubland, and evergreen forests. MROSD's mission statement outlines the critical functions of the agency and prioritizes how the land is managed, balancing the preservation of open space with land restoration and the provision for low-intensity public recreation. Specifically, MROSD'S mission is:

“To acquire and preserve a regional greenbelt of open space in perpetuity; protect and restore the natural environment; and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education.”

This mission statement serves as the policy framework with which all Preserve Plan goals, objectives, and implementation actions must remain consistent.

## PROJECT BACKGROUND AND NEED

Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve was established in 1999 with the purchase of two large properties from MROSD's private land trust partner, Peninsula Open Space Trust. These properties were previously owned by Hong Kong Metro Realty Company and had been the subject of planned residential and golf course development. Shortly after the purchase, MROSD entered into a month-to-month rental agreement with the existing tenant of Bear Creek Stables, and perimeter fencing was installed around the former Alma College site. Big Creek Lumber owned prior timber harvest rights to portions of the Preserve, and selective harvesting was carried out in 1999 and 2000.

Since its acquisition, the Preserve has been the subject of discrete use and management planning processes that have largely focused on critical and immediate stewardship concerns and maintained status-quo public use patterns. A comprehensive plan for Bear Creek Redwoods will provide Preserve-wide goals to help reinforce the Preserve's character, identify long-term management actions to protect and enhance its unique natural and cultural resources, and define the level and extent of allowable uses that are compatible with the land and the goals established for the Preserve.

## PREVIOUS PLANNING EFFORTS

The close proximity of the Preserve to major South Bay cities and the proposed upgrades of existing logging and access roads to establish a continuous, wooded trail system provides high recreational value, and the Preserve is expected to receive heavy visitor use once it is open to the public. Planning studies to guide future public access and stewardship actions were initiated shortly after Preserve acquisition. These initial plans culminated with the preparation of a draft Sierra Azul/Bear Creek Redwoods Master Plan and EIR (draft Master Plan) in 2009. As part of the development of the draft Master Plan, a series of stakeholder interviews and public workshops were conducted under the guidance of an Ad Hoc Committee of the Board. As part of the draft Master Plan process, MROSD developed a vision for the Preserve that has served to guide the completion of the Preserve Plan, which states:

*Hosting Santa Clara County's best-preserved, second growth redwood forest, Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve contains a rich historical past that has served to influence and shape the surrounding landscape. The Preserve shall provide the public with a South Peninsula opportunity for tranquil nature study and exploration in a cool, heavily forested canopy environment. The stewardship of this public open space preserve shall be of highest priority, followed by an extended trail system with greater access. Focus will be placed on restoring native habitats; reducing erosion and sedimentation for improved water quality; interpreting the land's historical and cultural resources; providing new staging opportunities to allow for greater public access; and expanding the interior trail connections within the Preserve.*

Due to other pressing project priorities, adoption of the larger multi-preserve Master Plan was deferred. Nonetheless, individual planning efforts for the Preserve did continue, including additional analysis for the Alma College site and Bear Creek Stables, and completion of a Road and Trail Inventory. In 2014, MROSD reinitiated and decoupled the larger Master Plan project to focus on Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve. Data and findings from the prior Master Plan effort served to inform and streamline the preparation of the Preserve Plan.

## PRESERVE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve is located west of Lexington Reservoir and Sierra Azul Preserve, south of El Sereno Open Space Preserve, southeast of Sanborn-Skyline County Park, and just north of Moody Gulch property owned by the County of Santa Clara. Private property abuts the entire Preserve except for the southeast corner, which is bordered by the County's Moody Gulch property that is under Santa Clara County

Park management and currently closed. Highway 17 is adjacent to the northeast corner of the Preserve, from which Bear Creek Road provides access to the Preserve (Exhibits 1 and 2).

The Preserve encompasses more than 1,400 acres of native evergreen forest, with smaller extents of grassland and oak woodland habitats. Three ponds provide year-round aquatic habitat. Much of Bear Creek Redwoods is steep and rugged, with several perennial and seasonal streams draining northeast to Lexington Reservoir.

## **EXISTING FACILITIES AND ACCESS**

### **Existing Facilities**

#### ***Trails and Parking Areas***

In 2000, a permit system was established for stable riders and the public for hiking and equestrian use of approximately 10 miles of historic logging and access roads on the eastern side of the Preserve. An existing, 10-vehicle permit parking lot was designated to serve permit holders. Because of the lack of additional parking and the absence of an established pedestrian crossing at Bear Creek Road, the western portion of the Preserve, and its additional 8 to 10 miles of historic roads, have remained closed. Purchase of the former Holmes Lumber Company property in 2010 brought the Preserve to its current size of 1,432 acres and closed the gap between the Preserve's eastern and western sides south of Summit Road.

#### ***Former Alma College Site***

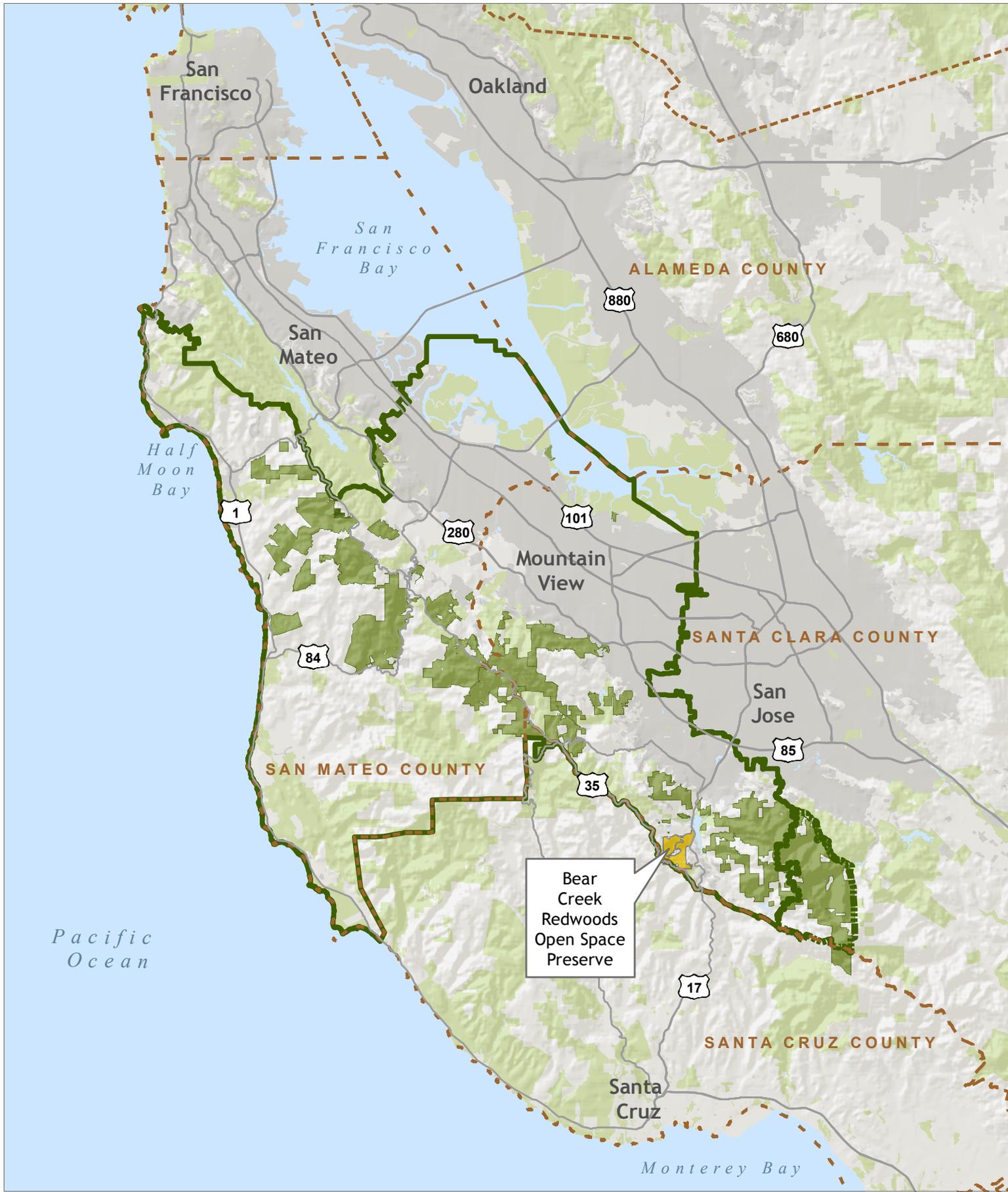
The former Alma College Site was originally developed as a sawmill site in the 1850s and was transitioned into an estate by Captain Stillman H. Knowles in 1887. In 1894 the Flood family expanded the estate, and in 1906, Dr. Harry Tevis purchased the land from the Floods and spent the next 25 years enlarging and rebuilding the estate with a bungalow mansion, a system of private roads and an extensive water system that fed his many highly specialized gardens. The Jesuits purchased the property for Alma College, the first Jesuit school of theology on the West Coast, in 1934. After the Jesuits moved in 1969, the Main House and Dormitories suffered fire damage. While a few buildings survived, most have been damaged or destroyed, and the remaining buildings are currently unoccupied and in disrepair. A surviving chapel was determined to be eligible for listing on the California Register of Historic Resources, and the site as a whole is listed on the Santa Clara County Heritage Resource Inventory due to its multi-layered history.

#### ***Bear Creek Stables***

Bear Creek Stables is located within the northeastern portion of Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve, off of Bear Creek Road and approximately 0.25-mile west of Highway 17. The site is accessed via a hardened driveway entrance off Bear Creek Road. The interior area of the Stables includes an unpaved loop road that circulates the main paddocks areas. The property's northwestern corner includes a permit parking space for one vehicle with a trailer. The stables contain a Main Pasture, "Old Folks" Pasture, Upper Arena, Dressage Arena, and paddocks for a maximum of 72 horses. Structures include a Main House, cottage, stables/shop, hay barn, hay barn/shop, and office. Activities and programs at the Stables currently include horseback riding along trails located around the facility and extending throughout the eastern half of the Preserve, educational programs for children (nature walks, caring for small farm animals in the Stables area) and occasional horse riding clinics.

#### **Public Access**

Currently, the western half of the Preserve is closed to the public, and the eastern half is open to trail-riding use by boarders at Bear Creek Stables and to the general public by permit only for hiking and equestrian use. Permits are issued for single-day use only, and the Preserve is open a half hour before sunrise until a half hour after sunset. The Preserve is publicly accessed via Bear Creek Road off Highway 17; several gates block public road access into the Preserve from other areas.



### Exhibit 1 Regional Location

 MROSD Preserves	 Urban Area	<p>Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (MROSD)</p> <p>June, 2015</p>  
 Other Protected Open Space or Park Lands	 MROSD Boundary	
	 MROSD Sphere of Influence	
	 County Boundary	



While the District strives to use the best available digital data, this data does not represent a legal survey and is merely a graphic illustration of geographic features.



### Exhibit 2 Preserve Location

- |  |  |  |   |
|--|--|--|---|
|  MROSD Preserves                             |  Urban Area                                     |  Existing Roads | Midpeninsula Regional<br>Open Space District<br>(MROSD) |
|  Other Protected Open Space<br>or Park Lands |  MROSD Conservation<br>or Agricultural Easement |  Highways       |   |
|  Watershed Land                              |  Easement over MROSD                            |  |   |



June, 2015

While the District strives to use the best available digital data, this data does not represent a legal survey and is merely a graphic illustration of geographic features.

## PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals and objectives for the planning process include the following:

- ▲ Create a long-term vision to guide decisions and management;
- ▲ Catalog and prioritize future site improvement needs;
- ▲ Involve the public and raise awareness of this valuable resource; and
- ▲ Uncover issues and adopt policies to address them.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed Preserve Plan would: expand access to the Preserve, upgrade existing logging and access roads, and create additional trails for public use; enhance native habitats and protect sensitive biotic resources; interpret and protect cultural resources; and expand, restore, maintain, and operate Preserve facilities over the long term. Expansion of Preserve public access facilities and implementation of resource protection and enhancement projects will be phased over the course of 15 to 20 years. The Preserve Plan will include four elements: 1) Public Use and Facilities, 2) Natural Resources, 3) Cultural Resources, and 4) Maintenance and Operations.

### PUBLIC USE AND FACILITIES ELEMENT

The Public Use and Facilities element of the Preserve Plan seeks to promote, enhance, and protect wilderness values by creating new trail connections to key Preserve destinations and adjacent open space areas, providing low-impact, site-sensitive interpretation and education activities, and actively involving the public in the use and management of the Preserve. Key actions of the public use and facilities element include opening up to 20 miles of trails to expanded hiking and equestrian use, potentially creating a multi-use through-trail (that includes mountain bicycle access ) connecting the Lexington Basin to the Skyline area, constructing three new parking areas, creating a safe pedestrian crossing of Bear Creek Road, formalizing key trailheads, expanding public equestrian programs at Bear Creek Stables, and interpreting the former Alma College historic site and other cultural resources.

### NATURAL RESOURCES ELEMENT

The Natural Resources element of the Preserve Plan will protect natural areas, wildlife corridors, and habitat for special status species, repair and monitor ecologically disturbed areas, and protect waterways to maintain water quality and healthy aquatic habitat. To achieve these goals, this element will focus on invasive plant management, restoration of highly disturbed or eroded areas, correction of high-priority sedimentation sources, protection of resident special-status bat populations, creation of habitat for common migratory bats, and protection of the Preserve's three year-round ponds and other aquatic habitat. The project will also include monitoring, mapping, providing cleaning stations for, and posting information on Sudden Oak Death to reduce its spread.

### CULTURAL RESOURCES ELEMENT

The Preserve Plan's Cultural Resources element would protect and interpret significant archaeological and historic resources at Bear Creek Redwoods over the long term. Key actions of this element include stabilization and/or rehabilitation of the former Alma College site and interpretation of the site's multi-layered history, which

has been extensively documented. This history would be revived and interpreted through restoration of certain landscape elements, including pathways/circulation patterns, remnant shrines, fountains, and other minor site features; native vegetation management to regain the site's former open and ordered character; and installation of signage and other interpretive materials. In addition, the chapel and library buildings are important to local history and retain sufficient structural and aesthetic soundness to be stabilized and/or rehabilitated with substantial partnership support. Design and planning for the former Alma College site is underway with assistance from an historic landscape architect, architectural historian, and structural engineer. This process will produce a concept for cultural landscape rehabilitation and interpretation, and will identify partnership opportunities for the potential rehabilitation and re-use of the historic structure(s). MROSD is currently exploring funding sources for stabilization/rehabilitation, re-use, and long-term maintenance of the former Alma College site structures, including potential vendor-operated, daytime special events.

Actions at the former Alma College site would conform to National Park Service Guidelines for Rehabilitating Cultural Landscapes and would create a new use for the site that: 1) retains its distinctive features and spatial relationships, 2) preserves the historic character of the property, and 3) retains historic structures that hold integrity and significance to the cultural landscape. Site rehabilitation may include selective demolition of existing structures if they are found to present a hazard to the public or cannot be repaired to current standards because of local geological conditions or cost constraints. Cultural resource actions will also include mapping, protecting, and monitoring stone mortars and other prehistoric sites and elements.

## **MAINTENANCE AND OPERATIONS ELEMENT**

Maintenance and Operations Element actions of the Preserve Plan would include maintenance of roads, trails, and facilities to protect the natural environment and provide for a quality visitor experience, address potential environmental and safety hazards, and ensure that all Preserve leases, easements, and other legal agreements are consistent with MROSD's mission. Such actions will likely include phased implementation of priority road and trail improvements to minimize erosion and ensure adequate patrol access in the long term (including repair or replacement of stream crossings), seasonal closure of poorly-drained trails, and sufficient patrol staff to ensure site security and visitor safety. This element will also identify phased improvements to Bear Creek Stables infrastructure to provide for increased public access, environmental protection, and equine health and safety.

### *Bear Creek Stables*

A Preliminary Stables Study described three potential scenarios for improving the Stables facilities and increasing public access. The alternatives include the reduction of the maximum number of boarded horses in paddocks from 72 to between 60 and 64 (with the option of introducing a livery for an additional 8 to 12 horses), improved access roads, a new parking lot for visitors, a dedicated horse trailer parking area, a new house for a groundskeeper at the Stables entry, office, a composting station, larger hay barn (3-month hay supply capacity), shop and storage building, and a visitor center facility. Alternatives for the visitor facility to date have included an outdoor classroom, restoring or replacing an old stables building, a new multi-use covered arena, but could also potentially include a re-configured plan that would reduce the area of disturbance by consolidating structures into a larger multi-use structure that could include storage, office space, and a visitor center.. The studies also recommend reducing the size of the Main Pasture and formalizing access trails to avoid additional erosion.

## **PROJECT CONSTRUCTION**

The Preserve Plan would be implemented as funding becomes available for specific features and facilities and would most likely be phased over 15-20 years, with the elements of the first phase completed within the first 2 years. During construction of individual project features and facilities, equipment and materials would be

temporarily stored on-site during construction of the proposed project. Equipment and materials would be limited to that needed to perform the work. Project construction would occur during the daytime on weekdays.

The Preserve Plan will include environmental protection features, including Best Management Practices (BMPs) and design elements that would protect valuable environmental resources from damage during construction.

## MAINTENANCE AND OPERATION

The overall long-term management goal for the Preserve is to protect and enhance the habitats on-site and provide for low-intensity recreation. Long-term management of the Preserve would include conducting ongoing patrols and monitoring of streams, springs, native vegetation, habitats, and use to determine stability and trends. Invasive species would also be monitored and removed as needed. Long-term management of the property would be primarily conducted by various MROSD departments.

Equipment and materials would also be stored on-site periodically for maintenance and management purposes. Equipment would be limited to that needed to perform the work. BMPs similar to those described above for construction would be included in the Preserve Plan for any equipment or materials storage areas.

MROSD would conduct monitoring and maintenance as part of the routine management of the Preserve.

## POTENTIAL APPROVALS AND PERMITS REQUIRED

The project would require approval from MROSD as the lead agency for purposes of CEQA compliance and project implementation. Permits and approvals may be required from the following federal, state, and local agencies for construction of the proposed project:

- ▲ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers—Clean Water Act Section 404 permit,
- ▲ California Department of Fish and Wildlife—California Fish and Game Code Section 1600,
- ▲ Bay Area Air Quality Management District—demolition permit
- ▲ County of Santa Clara—Landmark Alteration permit (requires review and approval by the Historic Heritage Commission), conditional use permit, demolition permit, grading permit, and building permits.

Other permits and approvals may be identified during preparation of the Draft EIR.

## POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The EIR will describe the direct and indirect significant environmental impacts of the proposed Preserve Plan. The EIR will also evaluate the cumulative impacts of the project when considered in conjunction with other related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects. The Draft EIR will focus on the following environmental issues:

- ▲ **Aesthetics.** The proposed Preserve Plan would result in physical changes to the existing site, including demolition of structures (including historic-era buildings), development of trails, installation of new parking facilities, and construction of new buildings. The Draft EIR will evaluate the potential for the proposed project to result in visual impacts, including effects to scenic views and the site's visual character, as well as light-and-glare-related impacts.
- ▲ **Air Quality.** Implementation of the proposed Preserve Plan would result in construction activities that would emit air pollutants. Increased visitor use would also increase vehicle trips and auto-related air emissions. Potential air-quality-related impacts will be addressed in this section of the Draft EIR.
- ▲ **Biological Resources.** The Preserve encompasses both common and sensitive habitats, and plant and wildlife species. Implementation of the proposed project will involve ground-disturbance during

construction, as well as placement of permanent new facilities and structures within currently undeveloped areas of the Preserve. Potential impacts to these sensitive habitats and special-status species will be evaluated in the Draft EIR.

- ▲ **Cultural Resources.** The project site has a rich history, and several historic-era buildings exist on the site, including structures currently listed on the County of Santa Clara's local register. The proposed project includes demolition of some structures. The Draft EIR will evaluate potential impacts to historic resources, as well as impacts to archaeological and paleontological resources.
- ▲ **Geology, Soils, and Seismicity.** The San Andreas Fault traverses the project site. Existing structures on the project site, especially those associated with the former Alma College site, are located very close to the San Andreas Fault and an associated fault trace. The Draft EIR will examine potential impacts related to allowing public access to the project site, especially in terms of seismic risk associated with existing structures. The Draft EIR will also examine potential hazards related to soil and slope stability, especially with respect to project site seismicity.
- ▲ **Greenhouse Gas Emissions.** The proposed project would increase visitation at the Preserve, which would generate additional vehicle trips. Also, new and expanded public use facilities may require additional energy demand. The Draft EIR will evaluate whether the increased vehicle trips and potential increased energy demand would generate a substantial amount of Greenhouse Gas.
- ▲ **Hazards and Hazardous Materials.** Previous studies conducted at the project site indicate the potential for hazardous materials to be present on the project site. The Draft EIR will examine whether hazardous materials are present on the site and whether implementation of the proposed project could expose construction workers, visitors, or nearby land uses to existing onsite hazardous materials.
- ▲ **Hydrology and Water Quality.** Implementation of the proposed Preserve Plan would result in ground-disturbing activities. Stormwater runoff could carry sediment from exposed soils into nearby waterways, thus affecting water quality. The proposed Preserve Plan will include Best Management Practices (BMPs) to reduce the potential for water quality impacts. However, the Draft EIR will examine the potential for these impacts and will identify mitigation measures, as necessary, to further reduce these impacts. Water-quality impacts related to potential septic tank improvements will also be addressed. Also, potential impacts related to flooding will be discussed.
- ▲ **Land Use.** It is anticipated that the project could require land use entitlements from Santa Clara County. The Draft EIR will evaluate the project's consistency with the County's General Plan land use designation and zoning.
- ▲ **Noise.** Construction activities associated with the proposed Preserve Plan would generate noise. Also, operation of the Preserve Plan would increase visitorship and would expand the existing uses currently allowed on the Property, including the potential for special events at the former Alma College site and spectator events at the Stables site. The Draft EIR will evaluate potential noise impacts resulting from construction and operation of the proposed Preserve Plan.
- ▲ **Recreation.** The proposed Preserve Plan would increase the number of visitors accessing trails and would provide increased connectivity to other regional trails (many operated by other agencies, such as Santa Clara County Parks). The EIR will examine potential effects associated with increased use of other parks and open space lands.
- ▲ **Traffic and Transportation.** Implementation of the proposed Preserve Plan would generate additional traffic during both the construction and the operation phases. The Draft EIR will evaluate potential impacts related to increased traffic, as well as potential impacts associated with project design features, including line-of-site and access configuration.
- ▲ **Utilities.** The proposed project would increase visitation at the site and would include expanded public use facilities, including potential special events. This will create additional demand for potable water and other public utilities. The Draft EIR will include an evaluation of the supply and demand for potable water and other utilities, as well as any potential infrastructure upgrades.

The Preserve Plan will include environmental protection features, including Best Management Practices (BMPs) and design elements that would protect valuable environmental resources from damage during construction. Practicable mitigation measures will be recommended in the Draft EIR to reduce any identified potentially significant and significant impacts. It is anticipated that the project would not result in potentially significant impacts related to Agriculture and Forestry Resources, Population and Housing, and Public Services; therefore, these issues are not anticipated to require detailed evaluation in the Draft EIR.

## ALTERNATIVES TO BE EVALUATED IN THE EIR

In accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines (14 CCR Section 15126.6), the EIR will describe a range of reasonable alternatives to the proposed project that are capable of meeting most of the projects' objectives, and would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project. The EIR will also identify any alternatives that were considered but rejected by the lead agency as infeasible and briefly explain the reasons why. The EIR will provide an analysis of the No Project Alternative and will also identify the environmentally superior alternative.

## DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC REVIEW

A hard-copy of the NOP is available for public review at:

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District  
330 Distel Circle  
Los Altos, CA 94022

The NOP is also available for public review online at: [http://www.openspace.org/news/public\\_notices.asp](http://www.openspace.org/news/public_notices.asp)

Preliminary Preserve Plan materials illustrating draft alternatives for Bear Creek Stables, Alma College Site Rehabilitation, and a proposed public access and phasing map are also available at: <http://www.openspace.org/our-work/projects/bcr-plan>

## PROVIDING COMMENTS

Agencies and interested parties may provide MROSD with written comments on topics to be addressed in the EIR for the project. Because of time limits mandated by State law, comments should be provided no later than 5:00 PM on **July 10, 2015**. Please send all comments to:

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District  
Attention: Lisa Infante Bankosh, Open Space Planner III  
Mailing Address: 330 Distel Circle, Los Altos, CA 94022  
Email: [lbankosh@openspace.org](mailto:lbankosh@openspace.org)

Comments provided by email should include "Bear Creek Redwoods NOP Scoping Comment" in the subject line, and the name and physical address of the commenter in the body of the email.

All comments on environmental issues received during the public comment period will be considered and addressed in the Draft EIR, which is anticipated to be available for public review in October 2015.

## **PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING**

A public scoping meeting will be held by MROSD to inform interested parties about the proposed Preserve Plan, and to provide agencies and the public with an opportunity to provide comments on the scope and content of the EIR. The meeting time and location are as follows:

June 24, 2015  
7:00 p.m.  
Grant Park Community Center  
1575 Holt Avenue  
Los Altos, CA 94022

The meeting space is accessible to persons with disabilities. Individuals needing special assistive devices will be accommodated to MROSD's best ability. For more information, please contact Lisa Bankosh (at the contact information above) at least 48 hours before the meeting.