



VIEWS

QUARTERLY NEWS FROM THE MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT · SUMMER 2023



Cloverdale Ranch Preserve is home to an abundance of diverse wildlife, including black-tailed deer. (Teddy Miller/POST)

Cloverdale Ranch

Newest Midpen Preserve Protects Natural and Working Lands

This summer, Midpen is celebrating the initial purchase of lands that will become Midpen's 27th open space preserve: Cloverdale Ranch, a unique ecological and agricultural jewel on the San Mateo County Coastside near the rural town of Pescadero.

The lands, first protected by our nonprofit partner Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST), contain large, intact coastal grasslands, one of the most biodiverse ecosystems in North America. The property also contains abundant water resources, both natural and human-made.

Together, the natural habitat and plentiful water support a diverse community of native wildlife and plant communities, including grassland-dependent species such as American badgers, burrowing owls and grasshopper sparrows. The property is also home to rare, threatened and endangered water-dependent species like Coho salmon, steelhead trout and California red-legged frogs. With Cloverdale Ranch Open Space Preserve situated between 31,000 acres of other protected lands, this vast property also

provides critical corridors for wildlife to move safely through the area, including wide-ranging mammals, fish and birds.

These rich resources have also supported people for thousands of years, starting with the Native Americans who tended this wild landscape since time immemorial. Cloverdale Ranch Preserve is also known for a rich agricultural history that continues today. Through our public-private partnership, Midpen and POST are helping to preserve farming and ranching on the



Unique for its abundance of water, Cloverdale Ranch Preserve supports rare aquatic wildlife such as California red-legged frogs. (Matt Sharp Chaney/Midpen)

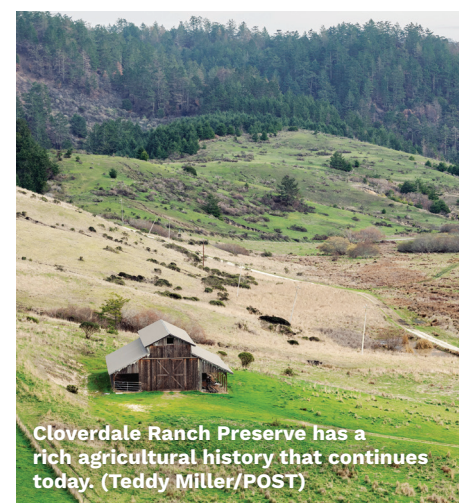
Coastside to produce locally grown food and protect the region's agricultural heritage. The existing conservation grazing leases in uplands areas are transferring to Midpen, while POST retains the surrounding row-crop agricultural lands as part of its farmland program.

Wilbur's Watch is currently the only public trail in Cloverdale Ranch Preserve. Accessible from a small parking area off Highway 1, this out-and-back trail gently climbs for about a mile through coastal scrub to a lookout with interpretive signs and panoramic coastal views.

Community Field Days in July

Balancing the protection of the natural and working lands with creating additional public access at Cloverdale Ranch Preserve will take time. In the interim, Midpen is offering guided access opportunities provided by trained volunteer docent naturalists. The first opportunities are Community Field Days on July 8 and 22, which will require reservations and include information about Midpen and Cloverdale Ranch Preserve and a guided hike to a scenic hilltop overlooking the preserve and coastline.

Learn more and sign up at openspace.org/Cloverdale-Ranch.



Cloverdale Ranch Preserve has a rich agricultural history that continues today. (Teddy Miller/POST)

“These guided outings are designed for the community to connect with the beautiful, ecologically rich open space that is in their backyards, and experience and learn about the many tangible and intangible benefits they provide.”

—Midpen Interpretation & Education Program Manager Ellen Tjosvold

INSIDE THIS ISSUE



Free Docent Guided Activities

Midpen docent naturalists share their passion for open space with diverse activities throughout the summer.

(Karl Gohl)



Nature Revealed

Rare wildlife discoveries in Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve prompt new research efforts.

(John Davis/Macaulay Library)



Right Tools for the Job

Midpen's proactive wildland fire resiliency program receives new grant-funded equipment.

(Ben Talavera/Midpen)

(Karl Gohl)

Summer 2023 Docent Naturalist Guided Activities

Are you ready to explore and enjoy the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District preserves? We invite you to discover these extraordinary places that include many thousands of acres of permanently protected open space, from redwood forest to bay shoreline. All guided activities are developed and provided by docent naturalists who have completed an extensive training program. These docents volunteer their time to enrich your experiences and share knowledge with you about natural and cultural history.

To pique your interest, take a look here at the list of guided activities and then refer to our website [openspace.org/guided-activities](https://www.openspace.org/guided-activities) for all additional needed details. The activities are FREE and only some require reservations. Please note that some preserves have more than one access point and some activities meet at a preserve or location other than where the guided activity will occur. If there is no special where to meet information then the activity meets at the preserve's main parking area.

June

Fremont Older History Ride

Saturday, June 3
9:30 a.m. – Noon
Fremont Older Preserve
11 Miles **B R**

Hike to Black Mountain

Saturday, June 3
10 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Monte Bello Preserve
7 Miles **S L**

East of the Sun and West of the Moon

Saturday, June 3
5 – 10:30 p.m.
Monte Bello Preserve
5 Miles **M L R**

Earthquake Walk

Sunday, June 4
2 – 4:30 p.m.
Los Trancos Preserve
2 Miles **E**

Explorer Hike: Nutmegs of Red Mountain

Wednesday, June 7
10:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Saratoga Gap Preserve
5 Miles **F M L**

Stevens Creek Watershed

Friday, June 9
9:30 a.m. – Noon
Monte Bello Preserve
3 Miles **M**



(Frances Freyberg)

Butterflies of Sierra Azul

Friday, June 9
10 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Sierra Azul Preserve
Meet: Bald Mountain Parking Area
3.5 Miles **M L**

Transitions: Exploring Life Cycles

Friday, June 9
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
El Corte de Madera Creek Preserve
5 Miles **M L**

Scenic Aerobic Hike

Wednesday, June 14
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Saratoga Gap Preserve
5 Miles **M**

Following in Ohlone Footsteps

Thursday, June 15
9 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.
Sierra Azul Preserve
Meet: Bald Mountain Parking Area
8.5 Miles **S L**

Hawthorns Area Hike

Thursday, June 15
10 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Windy Hill Preserve
Meet: Directions emailed
2 Miles **M R**

Romp in the Old Hayfield

Friday, June 16
9 a.m. – Noon
Fremont Older Preserve
3.5 Miles **E R**

Hiking and Mindfulness

Saturday, June 17
9:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Monte Bello Preserve
4 Miles **M L**

Geology: Moving Mountains

Saturday, June 17
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
Monte Bello Preserve
5 Miles **S**

Sierra Azul Sampler

Sunday, June 18
8:45 a.m. – 2:15 p.m.
Sierra Azul Preserve
Meet: Jacques Ridge parking area
6 Miles **S R**

Among the Redwood Trees and Native Bushes

Monday, June 19
9 a.m. – Noon
Thornewood Preserve
4 Miles **M**

Explorer Hike: A Four Park Loop

Wednesday, June 21
10:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Saratoga Gap Preserve
5 Miles **M L**

Trail Trek Thursday

Thursday, June 22
9 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Monte Bello Preserve
6.8 Miles **S**

Flowers: Not Just a Pretty Face!

Saturday, June 24
9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Russian Ridge Preserve
3 Miles **E F**

Morning Meander: Forested Canyon to Chaparral

Wednesday, June 28
9 – 11 a.m.
Sierra Azul Preserve
Meet: Jacques Ridge Parking Area
2 Miles **E**

July

Bay Trail Boardwalking

Saturday, July 1
10 a.m. – Noon
Ravenswood Preserve
2.5 Miles **E F W**

Earthquake Walk

Sunday, July 2
1 – 3:30 p.m.
Los Trancos Preserve
2 Miles **E**

Summer Cool

Thursday, July 6
9 a.m. – 1 p.m.
El Corte de Madera Creek Preserve
Meet: Skeggs Point Parking Area
4.5 Miles **M**

Pondering: What's in a Pond?

Saturday, July 8
9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Picchetti Ranch Preserve
2 Miles **E F**

Scenic Skyline Sampler

Sunday, July 9
9 a.m. – 2 p.m.
Skyline Ridge Preserve
7.5 Miles **S L**

Signs of Summer

Wednesday, July 12
9 a.m. – Noon
Pulgas Ridge Preserve
4.2 Miles **M**

Scenic Aerobic Hike

Wednesday, July 12
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Windy Hill Preserve
Meet: Lower Windy Hill Parking Area
5 Miles **S**

Peter's Creek Trail Run

Saturday, July 15
9 – 10:45 a.m.
Long Ridge Preserve
4.3 Miles **S**

Down on the Ranch

Saturday, July 22
9 a.m. – 1 p.m.
La Honda Creek Preserve
Meet: Directions emailed
5.5 Miles **M R**

Wonders of Cherry Springs

Sunday, July 23
9:45 a.m. – 2:15 p.m.
Sierra Azul Preserve
Meet: Directions emailed
3 Miles **M R**

Morning Meander: Cool Shade in July

Wednesday, July 26
9 – 11:30 a.m.
El Corte de Madera Creek Preserve
Meet: Skeggs Point Parking Area
2.7 Miles **M**

Trail Trek Thursday

Thursday, July 27
9 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Long Ridge Preserve
4.7 Miles **S**

Merry Berry Hike

Saturday, July 29
10 a.m. – Noon
Windy Hill Preserve
Meet: Lower Windy Hill Parking Area
2 Miles **E F**



(Sue Fuller)

August

Respite in the Redwoods

Monday, August 7
10 a.m. – 3 p.m.
Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve
5.4 Miles **S L**

Scenic Aerobic Hike

Wednesday, August 9
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
El Corte de Madera Creek Preserve
5.5 Miles **S**

Birding Without Birds

Thursday, August 10
9 a.m. – Noon
Windy Hill Preserve
Meet: Lower Windy Hill Parking Area
2 Miles **E**

Crossing Bridges

Saturday, August 12
9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
El Corte de Madera Creek Preserve
Meet: Skeggs Point Parking Area
3 Miles **E L**

The Bats at Alpine Pond

Saturday, August 19
6:15 – 8:25 p.m.
Skyline Ridge Preserve
Meet: Russian Ridge Parking Area
1.5 Miles **E**

Trail Trek Thursday

Thursday, August 24
9 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.
Los Trancos Preserve
6 Miles **S**

Signs of Summer

Monday, August 28
9 a.m. – Noon
Pulgas Ridge Preserve
4.2 Miles **M**

Legend

- E Easy Hike/Walk:** Flat to gently rolling hills. Total elevation gain less than 200 feet. Leisurely pace. Frequent stops. Usually less than 3 miles.
- B Bike Intermediate:** Intended for participants with dirt single-track riding experience; able to climb and descend steep and moderately rough trails. Recreational ride at a moderate/brisk pace; 8+ miles on a wide range of fire roads and single-track trails. For experienced riders in very good physical condition with good endurance.
- M Moderate Hike:** Steeper or more frequent uphill grades. Total elevation gain 200 to 600 feet. Leisurely to moderate pace. Usually between 3 and 5 miles.
- S Strenuous Hike:** Steep hills and/or long distances. Total elevation gain greater than 600 feet. Moderate to vigorous pace. Usually more than 5 miles.
- L Meal/Snack Break:** Bring a lunch, dinner or snack as appropriate.
- F Family Friendly:** Suitable for children; must be accompanied and supervised by an adult. See the activity description for any additional information.
- W Wheelchair Accessible**
- R Online Reservations Required:** [openspace.org/guided-activities](https://www.openspace.org/guided-activities) will accept reservations two weeks in advance of an activity date and allow a maximum of four people per reservation. No walk-up participation allowed. Please cancel your reservation if you can no longer attend.

A MESSAGE FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER

Sunnier Skies Help Midpen Crews Make Progress on Storm Damage Repairs



Ana María Ruiz

With sunnier days and warmer temperatures ahead of us, some may be apt to forget about the series of strong winter storms that struck the Bay Area in late 2022 and early 2023. At Midpen, the after-effects of these impactful storms remain, with many preserves and trails sustaining significant damage. Cleanup and

repair efforts to safely reopen trails in many locations will continue through the summer and, in the hardest-hit areas, into the fall and spring/summer of 2024.

Overall, the winter storms caused more than \$7.5 million in damages to Midpen preserves and we have applied for FEMA funding to cover a portion of the costs. We have also adjusted our budget and work plan for the coming fiscal year, reassigning staff from prior planned projects to focus on the extensive and unanticipated repair work to reestablish key trail connections and reopen roads for patrol, maintenance, and emergency response.

Midpen crews have been hard at work replacing culverts, clearing mudslides, and repairing ruts, gullies and washouts to make trails and roads passable. In addition, crews have cleared more than 1,200 downed trees and major limbs that were blocking pathways throughout Midpen preserves. Most of our 250 miles of trails are open, however, repairs to numerous popular routes still remain. In the coming months and into 2024, you will likely encounter the sounds of chainsaws and chippers along

“Scientists attribute the intensity of storms like these to our changing climate.”



Midpen Open Space Technician Ignacio Zavala clears a large fallen tree from a trail in Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve. (Brian Fair/Midpen)

with temporary trail closures to keep visitors safe as we continue these repairs.

Our trail work is governed by policies and practices that balance public safety with natural resource protection. Highly skilled work crews follow environmentally sensitive vegetation management protocols that include biological surveys of sensitive species and limiting high decibel noise-generating work during a May 15-October 15 window to avoid the bird nesting, bat roosting and woodrat nesting season. Sometimes, biosurveys can take up to two years to complete to ensure that biennially appearing native plants have been located.

One preserve, in particular, and a portion of another are expected to remain closed for several months as county crews repair heavily damaged public roadways that lead to preserve parking areas and trailheads. Bear Creek Redwoods is closed until the county is able to fix a major culvert failure on Bear Creek Road, and the lower entrance of Purisima Creek Redwoods is closed due to damage to both Higgins Canyon and Purisima Creek Roads.

You can find current trail conditions and closures on our website at openspace.org/trail-conditions.

MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT

Midpen helps plants, animals and people thrive throughout the greater Santa Cruz Mountains region by preserving a connected greenbelt of more than 70,000 acres of public open space. Midpen is a public agency created in 1972 by a grassroots voter initiative to protect the green spaces in parts of Santa Clara, San Mateo and Santa Cruz counties. We manage 27 open space preserves with more than 250 miles of trails for you to explore, free of charge, all year long.

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.

Our mission on the San Mateo County Coast: 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.

PUBLIC BOARD MEETINGS

Second and fourth Wednesdays of each month at 7 p.m. in-person and via Zoom. For details visit openspace.org/board-meetings

Ana María Ruiz, General Manager
Leigh Ann Gessner, Open Space Views Editor
Ellen Tjosvold, Guided Activities Editor



A Santa Cruz kangaroo rat, captured on a wildlife camera in Sierra Azul Preserve, stuffs its cheeks with manzanita berries to bury for a future meal. This helps the ecosystem too, because uneaten berries can survive fires and grow into new manzanita plants. (Ken Hickman)

Rare Wildlife Revealed

Surprising Discoveries Prompt New Research Efforts

The excitement was palpable as a group of UC Santa Cruz researchers and Midpen biologists gathered before dawn recently in Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve. All hopes were focused on finding an elusive giant in the ecological community: the Santa Cruz kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys venustus venustus*).

Although small in stature, and neither a kangaroo nor a rat, these rodents are more closely related to chipmunks and are a keystone species due to their outsized effects on other plants and animals in their ecosystem. Kangaroo rats prefer sandy soil where they can easily burrow and bury seeds for a future meal, particularly from manzanita plants. The seeds are then protected in this fire-prone environment, and those that are not eaten help the plants regenerate.

Before their recent discovery in Sierra Azul Preserve by independent biologist and Midpen partner Ken Hickman, they had not been documented in Santa Clara County since 1947. For the past 35 years, Santa Cruz kangaroo rats were known to exist only in a small pocket of sand

“The environmental restoration of the Mount Umunhum summit and care of other open space areas within Sierra Azul have revealed several surprising and reassuring discoveries of rare wildlife species that are really exciting. Now, we are working to understand and care for them and their habitats into the future.”

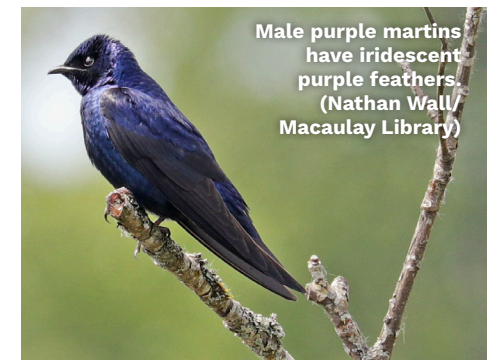
—Midpen Biologist
Matt Sharp Chaney

hills near Felton – and nowhere else on earth. Finding them in Sierra Azul again gives hope for their long-term survival and raises questions that this new research aims to answer about their population, and potential listing as an endangered species.

After an hour of peering into live-capture traps, baited with sterile nuts and filled with cotton fluff for warmth and comfort, Midpen biologist Matt Sharp Chaney saw two large dark eyes peering back. The team carefully removed the kangaroo rat and measured its ears, large hind feet and impressively long tail, and took a DNA sample before setting it free. After the first two weeks of trapping, four individual kangaroo rats had been identified. The research is expected to continue into 2025.

Nearby in the same preserve, another team of Midpen staff were installing custom-made nesting boxes for purple martins high up on predator-safe poles. Prior to these large swallows being discovered during the restoration of Mount Umunhum, many biologists believed these birds had disappeared entirely from Santa Clara County. The western purple martin (*Progne subis arboricola*) has iridescent purple feathers and a call that sounds like the *Star Wars* character R2-D2. They migrate into our area in early spring to nest and raise their young.

“We’re anxiously watching to see if the purple martins in Sierra Azul Preserve successfully hatch chicks in the new nesting boxes that Midpen staff carefully designed and installed just for them,” explained Midpen Biologist Karine Tokatlian, who leads the project.



Male purple martins have iridescent purple feathers. (Nathan Wall/Macaulay Library)

If you visit the Mount Umunhum area of Sierra Azul this summer, remember to look up and listen for these charismatic birds, and marvel at the wildlife discoveries that protected and cared-for public lands can reveal and support.

Learn more about our research at openspace.org/Sierra-Azul.

New Equipment Builds Capacity for Increased Wildland Fire Resiliency Work

Proactively improving the resiliency of open space lands to potential wildland fires is physically hard and demanding work requiring many hands and the right tools. For several years, Midpen has been expanding our capacity to perform more year-round ecologically sensitive vegetation management projects in our preserves. Partnerships with other organizations like the San Jose Conservation Corps and local FireSafe Councils, augment the hiring of additional staff. A \$1.08 million State Coastal Conservancy grant is helping to fund several aspects of Midpen’s Wildland Fire Resiliency Program, including the purchase of new equipment.

To date, Midpen has purchased a new remotely controlled mower and a new chipper. The mower is used to perform work in steep areas in conjunction with careful biological surveys to avoid sensitive plants, wildlife or nest sites. The chipper is increasing the pace of work by easily processing large stacks of brush and limbs. Staff continue to test out the latest equipment, seeking the best tools for making Midpen’s vegetation management work more efficient, effective and protective of the natural environment.

Learn more at openspace.org/fire.



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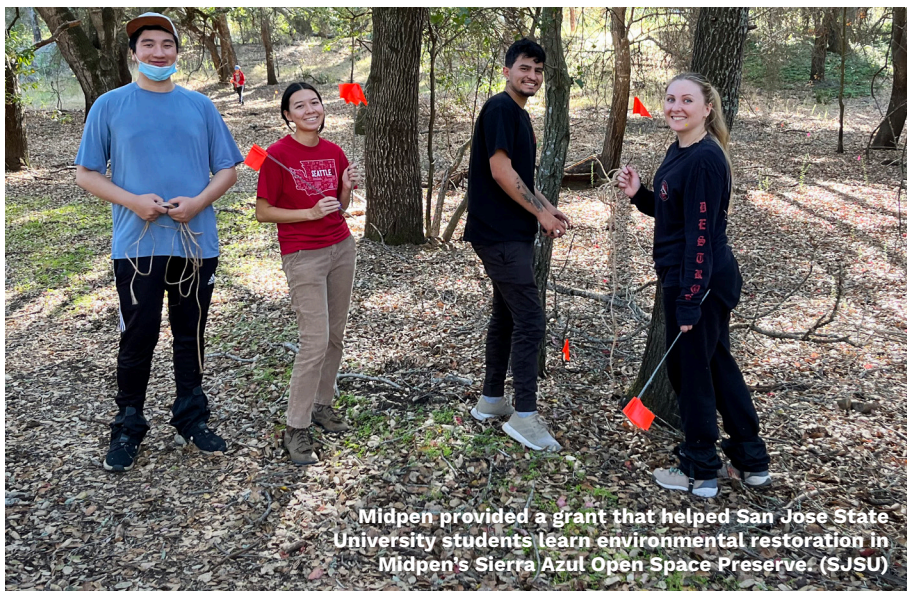


Get Inspired! 2023 Digital Photo Contest

Midpen's annual photo contest returns with online entries accepted through **June 30** with fans voting for their favorite images on Facebook and Instagram in **July**. One winner in each category will receive a \$100 REI gift card and a Midpen swag bag. Categories are:

- Landscapes
- Plant Life
- Wildlife
- People in Nature
- Aspiring Photographers for youth grades 6-12
- The Trail Less Traveled, a new category seeking photos featuring less-often visited Midpen preserves

Find all of the contest details at openspace.org/photo.



Midpen provided a grant that helped San Jose State University students learn environmental restoration in Midpen's Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve. (SJSU)

Hands-On Learning

Midpen Grant Introduces Students to Science Outdoors

Despite the early hour and chill in the air, a group of San José State University (SJSU) students ventured bright-eyed into an area of Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve dominated by nonnative, invasive eucalyptus trees. Dubbed the "bird group," this crew kept a keen eye and ear out for flapping wings and high-pitched chirps. What birds live in this eucalyptus forest? How are their populations different from those of nearby native habitats? The bird group sought answers to these questions to fulfill the field research component of their environmental restoration course.

This outdoor education program began when SJSU Assistant Professor Metha Klock noticed a distinct lack of hands-on habitat restoration experiences available to students at the university. Though she wanted her students to have opportunities to

conduct fieldwork, Klock found that SJSU did not possess the infrastructure necessary to provide them with easy access to nearby natural areas, including the local Midpen public open space preserves.

With a clearly identified need, Klock applied for a Midpen grant, and was awarded nearly \$50,000 to help SJSU's socioeconomically and ethnically diverse students more easily access field sites and provide them with the appropriate tools to engage with the natural world.

The funding paid for gear for students to use while in the field, like gaiters to protect ankles from poking plants and Tecnu, a cleanser used in case of an accidental brush with poison oak. The funding also helped SJSU acquire field equipment: wildlife cameras, binoculars for bird observations and

testing kits to determine the nitrogen content of soil samples. Students were also offered \$100 stipends to cover the cost of gas to reach remote sites.

"The goal of the program is to have students contribute to Midpen's understanding of these sites, and have them be part of a project that will last beyond their time in this class," Klock said. "My hope is that participating in this project will help students feel more attached to nature and remove overarching barriers to access."

The program debuted in fall 2022, when students taking an introductory environmental restoration course visited Sierra Azul Preserve. They gathered information on the eucalyptus trees prior to a planned environmental restoration project that will remove the non-native trees to facilitate growth of native plants for improved ecological health and wildland fire safety. Klock also oversees a senior seminar course in which students form their own scientific questions about Midpen preserves to research and answer.

"The program has been successful. Students say they feel more comfortable visiting natural areas and are more confident doing environmental restoration and applying to jobs. I want to make sure students don't feel limited."

—Metha Klock
SJSU Assistant Professor

Learn more about Midpen's grant program at openspace.org/grants.



Children discover a geocache in Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve. (Midpen staff)

Geocaching Program Invites Participants and Seeks Volunteers

Have you heard of geocaching? It's a high-tech treasure hunting activity where the objective is to locate hidden containers called geocaches outdoors. Participants use a GPS-enabled device, such as a smart phone, and coordinates that are posted online through a geocaching app. The best part is that players of all ages, levels of physical fitness and tech-savviness can enjoy this activity as a way to explore the world around them and share their experiences online with the geocaching community.

Since 2011, Midpen has hosted its own series of caches called the Preserve Circuit Geo-Challenge, designed to encourage technology-focused youth and their families to spend time in nature together.

The public is always welcome to try out geocaching in Midpen preserves, which are free and open daily. Currently, Midpen is also seeking experienced geocachers interested in volunteering as Cache Stewards to help maintain our current caches, find replacement hides for archived caches and help us continue growing the program.

Details at openspace.org/geocaching.