



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-26-124
Meeting 26-20
August 26, 2026

SPECIAL MEETING AGENDA ITEM 1

AGENDA ITEM

El Corte de Madera Creek Single-Use Biking/Hiking Trail Project

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION

Confirm the project scope and planning process for the El Corte de Madera Creek Single-Use Biking/Hiking Trail Project.

SUMMARY

The El Corte de Madera Creek Single-use Biking/Hiking Trail Project (Project) was identified as a priority project in the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's (District) 2014 Open Space Vision Plan and as part of Measure AA Portfolio #04. This Project is limited specifically to El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve. To proceed with this Project and ensure alignment with Board of Directors (Board) direction, District staff is seeking Board confirmation on the scope of work, including implementation options, project phases, and a proposed community engagement approach.

DISCUSSION

Background

El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve (Preserve) is located in unincorporated San Mateo County off Highway 35 (Skyline Boulevard), west of the Town of Woodside, and about 3.9 miles north of Highway 84. The Preserve encompasses approximately 2,900 acres in the Santa Cruz Mountains along the upper headwaters of the San Gregorio Creek watershed. The Preserve protects significant natural resources, including redwood and mixed evergreen forests and sensitive wildlife habitat for fish, birds, and other species. More than 34 miles of multi-use trails are available and accessible to the public, see Attachment 1 for the Preserve map. While it is one of the District's most popular open space preserves for mountain biking, it also provides opportunities for hiking and horseback riding.

The District began acquiring lands that now comprise the Preserve in 1985. Prior to District ownership, the Preserve experienced decades of human impacts, including logging and off-road vehicle use. These activities were discontinued following District acquisition of the property and management of the interior roads and trails.

To guide recreational use and resource management, the District adopted the El Corte de Madera Creek Preserve Trail Use Plan (Trail Plan) in 1996. The Trail Plan established a comprehensive trail network that allows a variety of trail users to enjoy the Preserve while protecting the

surrounding natural resources. Since its adoption, the trail system has continued to evolve through ongoing maintenance, resource protection efforts, and visitor management activities.

From 2004 to 2020, the District implemented and completed the El Corte de Madera Creek Watershed Protection Program (WPP). As part of the program, the District designed and constructed new trail segments within a comprehensive effort to improve watershed health, reduce erosion and sediment delivery to the watershed, and enhance the long-term sustainability of the trail network. The final scientific study demonstrating the program's success was completed and presented to the Board on August 26, 2020 ([R-20-76](#)). The study confirmed the program's success in protecting and restoring ecological integrity, while allowing opportunities for safe and ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education.

The Preserve, commonly referred to by the mountain biking community as "Skeggs," has been one of the region's most popular mountain biking destinations for several decades. Widely recognized throughout the Bay Area, the Preserve features an extensive trail network, diverse terrain, and a wide variety of riding experiences that accommodate riders of all skill levels, from beginner-friendly routes to more technical trails, while supporting numerous loop opportunities. Many of the Preserve's multi-use trails are among the most heavily used mountain biking routes within the District's larger trail system. Its location along the Skyline Boulevard corridor, combined with a major trailhead parking area and restroom facilities, make the Preserve readily accessible to mountain bikers from across the San Francisco Bay Area. Its strong popularity for mountain biking use, established trail network, and long history of trail uses are believed to be the reasons why the El Corte de Madera Creek Single-Use Biking/Hiking Trail Project was identified and included in the Vision Plan and Measure AA.

The Vision Plan, adopted by the Board in 2014, establishes a 40-year framework for implementing public access and resource management projects that advance the District's mission of balancing recreation, resource protection, and the visitor experience. Voters subsequently approved Measure AA in 2014 with Portfolio #04 providing funding for the District to:

“Develop single-use biking/hiking trails, complete Ridge Trail gaps, and develop trail system leading to parking area. Restore damaged trails to improve water quality. Preserve additional open space as available.”

This report focuses on the project priority action underlined above.

Proposed Scope for the El Corte de Madera Creek Single-Use Biking/Hiking Trail Project

The Project description is as follows *“develop single-use biking/hiking trails”*. Based on this language, an interpretation of the scope and project intent is to offer one or more single-use biking trails and separately, one or more single-use hiking trails within the Preserve. This can be achieved in different ways by: re-designating an existing trail for a single use (either year-round or seasonally), re-designating and modifying an existing trail for a single use, or by adding one or more new trails for a single use. These options are discussed in more detail below under *Trail Options for Consideration*. For this Project, a biking only trail is proposed to be evaluated first, prior to evaluating a hiking only trail since the Preserve already offers a hiking only trail to the Tafari Sandstone Formation.

The primary applicable policy for this Project is Board Policy 4.07: [Trail Use Policy](#). This policy establishes allowable uses and a classification system for all District trails and provides a framework for evaluating trail-user compatibility, visitor safety, resource protection, and operational considerations. The Board received an informational overview of the Trail Use Policy at a Board Study Session on October 25, 2023 ([R-23-119](#)). The Trail Use Policy allows for various trail use designations, including single-use hiking only trails. However, the current policy does not allow for *single-use biking* trails. To proceed with the Project as scoped above, a change to the Trail Use Policy would need to be made. Since this Project is intended to be specific to El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve, the most appropriate way to handle this change would be to make a special allowance within the Trail Use Policy for biking-only trails that applies exclusively to El Corte de Madera Open Space Preserve.

Trail Options for Consideration

Three trails options can be considered to implement the Project. One or more of these options can be selected to incorporate into the Project scope.

Option 1 – Redesignate the Use(s) of an Existing Trail with Minimal Improvements - *Recommended*

Option 1 would focus on converting an existing trail by changing its use designation(s) with minimal physical modifications. This option provides the quickest approach for implementing single-use biking and single-use hiking trail(s) through a change in trail use designation(s). Improvements would generally be minor, such as updating signage and mapping, along with ongoing maintenance, monitoring, and enforcement to support the new trail use designation(s).

As part of this option, the District could also consider:

- A. An alternating-seasons approach by re-designating an existing trail as biking only for certain seasons and re-designating the same trail as hiking only during the other seasons. This approach uses a land management tool to set use parameters based on seasons to offer single-use biking and single-use hiking trail(s) within the preserve. To reduce visitor confusion, support high compliance, and reduce operational demands on patrol and enforcement, seasons are recommended versus days of the week or days of the month.
- B. As an alternative to two-way travel, the District could evaluate re-designating an existing trail as a biking-only for a one-way/directional travel. Establishing a single direction of travel for biking-only use could improve trail circulation, reduce conflicts between riders traveling in opposite directions, and provide greater flexibility to design the trail experience. This approach could be implemented as a year-around biking-only one-way travel designation or in combination with an alternating-seasons approach.

Option 1 offers the most straightforward approach to meeting project goals while minimizing ground disturbance and environmental impacts by utilizing existing trails within the Preserve's established trail network. This approach may be considered the most appropriate given the Preserve's highly dense trail network. Option 1 is the least costly and quickest to implement.

Option 2 – Reimagine and Improve an Existing Trail - *Recommended*

Option 2 modifies significant segments of an existing trail within the Preserve. This option can deliver the desired trail experience while incorporating design improvements that enhance trail sustainability and reduce erosion consistent with the WPP. Improvements may include narrowing the trail width, selective rerouting, reconstructing trail segments, enhancing drainage and erosion control, and/or adjusting grades to improve trail function, resilience, and the visitor experience. This approach can also incorporate sustainable trail features to improve the mountain biking experience while promoting bicycle speeds within the legal limits. Overall, Option 2 allows the District to effectively improve the trail user experience while addressing existing maintenance needs and reducing resource impacts. This approach is moderate in cost and would take more time to redesign and reconstruct segments of a selected trail. Once redesigned and reconstructed, use designations can be considered as described under Option 1.

Option 3 – Construct a New Trail for the Designated Uses

Option 3 represents the highest level of trail improvements and would involve constructing a new trail segment(s), using the Trail Plan and Watershed Protection Program as guides. New trail construction provides the greatest flexibility to design a purpose-built trail that best accommodates the user group(s) and site conditions. However, it is also the costliest and most time-intensive option, requiring additional staff resources for feasibility studies, environmental review, design, permitting, and construction. In considering priorities for new trail construction, it is worth noting that the Preserve currently offers more miles of trail (34 miles) than any other preserve, with a notably dense trail network.

Project Planning Phases

Once the scope for the El Corte de Madera Single-use Biking/Hiking Project is confirmed by the Board, the following phased planning process can be considered for the Project. The phased planning process described below provides opportunities for public engagement and Board feedback at key milestones, allowing staff to further refine elements of the scope, consistent with prior Board direction, to reflect any new adjustments as the Project evolves.

Phase 1: Feasibility Evaluation

During this first phase, staff would identify and evaluate potential opportunities to implement the scope of work within the Preserve. This phase includes reviewing existing plans and policies, clarifying project objectives, conducting preliminary site assessments, engaging with trail user groups and the public, and evaluating opportunities and constraints.

Phase 2: Conceptual Design

Based on public input during the feasibility phase, staff would prepare conceptual design(s) for Board consideration. Under this phase, staff would prepare implementation recommendation(s), develop cost estimate(s), and further assess operational and maintenance consideration(s).

Phase 3: Design Development and Environmental Review

Pending Board acceptance, the conceptual design(s) would advance through design development and environmental review (CEQA). This phase includes any required technical studies and refinements to avoid, minimize, or mitigate potential impacts.

Following the completion of environmental review, District staff would obtain required permits and complete final design and construction. Ongoing monitoring and enforcement measures would be implemented, as necessary, to support compliance with trail use designations, protect natural resources, and inform future trail management decisions.

Community Engagement

Following input and confirmation from the Board on the Project scope, staff proposes to conduct stakeholder and public outreach to gather public feedback that can inform project refinements. Staff anticipate holding virtual focus group meetings with representatives of the mountain biking community, hiking and equestrian community, and environmental advocacy groups to understand the interests, concerns, and priorities related to the Board-confirmed project scope. Additionally, staff would facilitate an in-person public workshop/open house, providing an opportunity for the broader community and all trail user groups to provide additional input.

FISCAL IMPACT

None. The Board is reviewing and providing feedback on the project scope of work and options for implementation.

PRIOR BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

This item was not previously recommended by a Board committee or by the Board.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act. Additionally, notice was provided to the El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve, Biking, Hiking, Equestrian and Natural Resources interested parties lists.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

This item is not a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act. Environmental review is anticipated to occur in the future after the Board has provided direction regarding the preferred level of trail improvements and/or any proposed changes to trail use designations.

NEXT STEPS

The project team plans to conduct focus group meetings and an open house following Board input and confirmation on the scope of work. Staff will present conceptual design(s) to the full Board at a future Board meeting for review and guidance in the next phase of project development. The table below provides a tentative overall project schedule and anticipated upcoming meetings.

Tentative Dates (calendar year)	Milestones
Summer 2026	Confirm Scope and Approach with the Board
Fall 2026 - Winter 2026/27	Phase 1: Feasibility Study - focused trail user group meetings and Open House

Spring - Summer 2027	Phase 2: Conceptual Design - develop conceptual trail design(s) with final refined scope, schedule and budget for implementation
Fall 2027	Present preferred concept design(s) to the Board
Spring 2027 – Spring 2028	Phase 3a: Design Development
Spring 2028 – Spring 2029 <i>(dependent on level of CEQA documentation required)</i>	Phase 3b: Environmental Review - conduct CEQA environmental review. Pending completion of CEQA review, present the Project to the Board for approval

Attachment**1. El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve Map**

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El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve

For more information, visit <https://www.openspace.org/maps> or call 650-691-1200.

Map Legend

- Midpen preserve
- Closed area (no public access)
- Other protected land
- Private property (no public access)
- No public entry in Midpen water areas
- Road
- Vehicle driveway
- Hiking-only trail
- Hiking, equestrian trail
- Hiking, bicycling, equestrian trail
- Easy-access trail
- Bay Area Ridge Trail
- Trail distance (miles)
- Gate (#)
- Parking area
- Roadside parking
- Equestrian parking area
- Restroom
- Point of interest
- Notable flora
- Picnic table

Dogs not permitted in this preserve.

In case of emergency, call 911.

For your safety and the protection of the preserves:

The preserve is open one-half hour before official sunrise until one-half hour after official sunset.

Leave no trace: do not disturb natural features, plants or animals.

Keep it crumb clean: do not leave food or litter behind.

Take valuables with you and lock your vehicle.