



Midpeninsula Regional  
Open Space District

R-23-85  
Meeting 23-20  
August 9, 2023

## AGENDA ITEM 10

### AGENDA ITEM

Youth Outreach Update

### GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION(S)

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1. Receive an informational report on youth engagement and the Youth Outreach Plan.
2. Review and provide input on next steps for the Youth Outreach Plan. No Board action is required.

### SUMMARY

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's (District) Board of Directors (Board) set a goal to expand educational programs to reach underserved communities. The District recognizes the importance of engaging youth, as they are the next generation of environmental leaders. The Board approved a Youth Outreach Plan ([R-20-88](#)) on August 12, 2020, to expand the District's youth engagement activities with implementation set to begin in Fiscal Year (FY) 2021. With delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic many of the engagement and education opportunities were put on hold until late 2021/early 2022. The strategies that were developed collaboratively across departments within the Youth Outreach Plan include the following specific action recommendations:

- Conduct Youth Pilot Program introductory outdoor program with four local youth groups.
- Increase youth-related community tabling events from 30% to 40%.
- Promote existing programming to raise awareness and increase participation.
- Increase connection opportunities beyond existing programming.
- Create a list of future youth outreach and programming ideas.

The District's current programs target youth aged 5-21, in elementary school, middle school, high school, and college.

Within the District, the Visitors Services and Public Affairs departments have shared the lead responsibility of furthering the Board of Directors Strategic Plan goal to: *Connect people to open space and a regional environmental protection vision* by meeting the following objectives:

- *Refine and implement a comprehensive public engagement strategy, including the outreach to diverse communities and enhanced public education programs; and*
- *Expand opportunities to connect people to their public open space preserves consistent with a regional environmental protection vision.*

In addition to a recap of the District's progress on the above youth programming actions since implementation of the Youth Outreach Plan began in 2022, staff will discontinue the Youth Pilot Program and incorporate it into the core work of the District as the Youth Partnership Program.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **External Partnerships**

The District has enhanced partnerships with external organizations and agencies to engage students and young adults with the outdoors in a variety of ways. Since 2022, these external partnerships reached approximately 1,200 youth.

#### ***Environmental Volunteers (2018 to present)***

Environmental Volunteers (EV) is a Palo Alto-based non-profit whose mission is to promote environmental understanding through hands-on science education. EV have provided programming on District preserves for over 20 years. The District's Interpretation & Education Program staff have informally collaborated with EV since 2018 to offer educational field trips to students at various District preserves. During FY 2023 (July 1 – June 30) there were nearly 500 students on 17 field trips in Los Trancos, Monte Bello, and Windy Hill Open Space Preserves led by EV staff and volunteers.

#### ***Grassroots Ecology (2015 to present)***

Grassroots Ecology is a Palo Alto-based nonprofit focused on engaging and educating the public to restore local ecosystems. They work with the District to provide stewardship and volunteer engagement services with youth and the community. Since January 2022, Grassroots Ecology has engaged 487 youth volunteers with restoration projects, including the removal of invasive species and planting of native plants. These projects have taken place at Ravenswood, Hawthorns Area of Windy Hill, Bear Creek Redwoods, and Russian Ridge Open Space Preserves.

#### ***Latino Outdoors (2015 to present)***

In 2015, the District began collaborating with Latino Outdoors (LO) to bring families, youth, seniors, and new users to District preserves for outdoor programming, including family-friendly hikes, an annual backpacking trip to Black Mountain (Monte Bello Preserve) and volunteer projects. Under the 2022 partnership agreement, Latino Outdoors delivered 10 educational nature experiences. Program topics covered include health and wellness, responsible recreation, Leave

No Trace principles and an introduction to backpacking. Since 2022, over 100 youth attendees have participated in District/Latino Outdoors programs with their families.

***San Jose Conservation Corps & Charter School***

San Jose Conservation Corps & Charter School (SJCCCS) is a San Jose-based nonprofit that provides job training to local youth, ages 18-27, in a wide variety of environmental fields while they work to obtain their GED. In 2022, approximately 20 youth members were involved in seven different projects in the Skyline Area, and in 2023, approximately 20 youth members were involved in seven projects in the Skyline Area for projects mostly involved in creating shaded fuel breaks, emergency escape routes, and clearing downed trees. The youth in these projects cultivated teamwork, learned new technical skills from Land & Facilities staff, and developed a passion for the natural world.

***Santa Clara County Library District (2022 to present)***

Volunteer Docent Naturalists provide guided activities in District preserves in collaboration with the Santa Clara County Library District (SCCLD) on a quarterly basis. Participants sign up for these registration-based activities on the library website and reach new audiences in the preserves, including youth participants. In 2022, the District's Interpretive Specialist and a Volunteer Docent Naturalist provided a virtual program "Creativity in Nature" for approximately 20 library participants. In 2022, District rangers participated in a SCCLD educational special event, Silicon Valley Reads, where they presented how the District protects and restores the natural environment to create landscapes that are resilient to the effects of climate change and provide spaces where people can connect to nature for physical, emotional, and mental health benefits.

***Save the Redwoods League (2015 to present)***

Interpretation & Education Program (Visitor Services) staff have partnered with Save the Redwoods League (SRL) to offer high school students field trip excursions at Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve. SRL is a San Francisco-based nonprofit whose mission is to protect and restore coastal redwood forests and connect people with nature. With staff and docent guidance, students worked together to measure the height and diameter of redwood trees, calculated the carbon storage of the tree, studied the effects of climate change on sword ferns, and conducted plant observations. Students also participated in a Bioblitz, a community science activity that documents as many different species as possible with the iNaturalist app. The District provides transportation reimbursement for these field trips. Approximately 120 students participated in these field trips in the 2017-2018 school year. In early spring 2020 there was one class of 32 students. There is interest from high school teachers to take part in this field trip again in 2024.

***Siena Youth Center (Summer 2023)***

The Siena Youth Center (SYC) is a family/youth serving nonprofit program of the St. Francis Center based in the North Fair Oaks community of Redwood City. SYC reached out to District staff to request programming for their students in summer 2023. At the end of July 2023, District

Interpretation & Education Program staff and Volunteer Outdoor Education Docents provided 6 programs, each with about 13 students (total 76 students) ranging from age 5–13 at Skyline Ridge Preserve to learn about the different plant communities, observe pond macroinvertebrates in microscopes, go on a guided hike and meet the District gopher snake Rolo. For many participants, this was their first time visiting a District preserve. Due to the success of these programs, SYC's program director is already requesting programming for the Summer of 2024.

### **Internal Programming**

The District offers a wide variety of youth programming provided by staff and docents. In addition, District staff conduct outreach via tabling at community events and presentations to libraries, schools and community organizations. These internal outreach and programming efforts have reached approximately 10,000+ youth since 2022.

### ***Community Outreach Events (2011 to present)***

Since 2011, District staff have conducted community outreach at a variety of different public events. Throughout 2022 and 2023, Public Affairs staff have so far provided informational resources at 39 community events. Just over 40% (16 in total) of these events were specifically targeted to children, youth, and families, including City of Half Moon Bay Concerts in the Park-, Coastal Wildflower Day, College of San Mateo Internship Fair, Deer Hollow Farm Barn Days, East Palo Alto Cinco de Mayo Festival, Geocaching Mega-Event, Mountain View Health Fair, Pescadero Arts and Fun Festival, Pigeon Point Lighthouse Anniversary, Portola Valley Palooza, Rotary Day of Service, San Jose State University Earth Day Resource Fair, Santa Clara County Day on the Bay, San Mateo County Parks Summerfest, Saratoga Elementary School Earth Day and Saved by Nature's BAT Fest. Anecdotally, participants are typically interested in finding information on beginner hiking trails suitable for all age levels, so staff provides brochures, maps, and information to cater to new users, families, and youth. Staff was able to achieve the goal from the 2019 youth recap report of increasing tabling events from 30% to 40% youth focused and will continue to table at community events that have a focus on youth and the outdoors.

### ***Community Presentations***

District staff have provided many educational presentations to engage youth. District Rangers have provided classroom visits on an ad-hoc basis, discussing the different duties of a ranger and offering tips on how to get started in the environmental field. These engagements are typically tracked by ranger staff through an "Interpretation Log" to track their activities and outreach with the public. Between 2022 - 2023 Rangers offered programming to groups such as Saved by Nature, the HEAL Project, Coastside Childrens, Play N'Learn Preschool, Teachers at Oak Knoll School, Santa Clara County Office of Education Career Fair K-8, a Girl Scout Group, tabling at various preserves, and others.

### ***Daniels Nature Center (1996 to present)***

The David C. Daniels Nature Center at Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve is the District's only nature center facility. Open on weekends from April to October, the nature center offers

interpretive information about local habitats, with an emphasis on Alpine Pond. Nature Center Docents and staff greet visitors, share natural history information, and offer wildlife viewing activities. Inside the nature center, there are pond strata mobiles, a large-scale natural community exhibits, pond food webs, and a skulls and skins display.

	<b>2017 Apr. 1- Dec. 9</b>	<b>2018 Apr. 2- Dec. 1</b>	<b>2019 Mar. 30- Nov. 16</b>	<b>2022 Apr. 14- Nov. 20</b>	<b>Spring 2023 Apr. 1- Jun. 8</b>
Number of visitors (adults)	2127	2060	2512	1572	1419
Number of visitors (youth)	768	738	772	352	302

*Note: No data available for 2020 or 2021 as the facility was closed due to COVID-19 health and safety considerations.*

#### ***Volunteer Docent Naturalist Program (1977 to present)***

There are approximately 110 Volunteer Docent Naturalists (DNs). Many of the DN guided activities reach youth participants, especially the activities that docents specifically plan to be family-friendly (approximately 20%).

	<b>10/20/2021- 12/21/2021</b>	<b>1/1/2022- 12/31/2022</b>	<b>1/1/2023- 6/8/2023</b>
Number of participants (all ages) on guided activities	88	2,329	798
Number of guided activities (guided hikes, bike rides, equestrian rides)	14	162	95
Docent Naturalist hours	40	4755	1476

#### ***Environmental Education Specialist School Visits (2022 to present)***

Since filling the position in November 2022, the Environmental Education Specialist (Visitor Services) has engaged nearly 400 youth at various elementary schools that fall within the district boundaries leading a variety of hands-on environmental education programs including a presentation to third graders on special status species, leading an interactive educational game at an all-campus Earth Day celebration, and interpreting the District gopher snake Rolo with a group of students at local elementary schools.

***Grantmaking Program (2018 to present)***

In 2018, the District implemented a grantmaking program dedicated to funding \$250,000 annually to projects with a focus on furthering the scientific understanding of our natural world through applied science, building capacity in the conservation field by providing network and partnership supports, and enhancing environmental access, interpretation, and/or education for the public. The program aims to support a diverse array of local academic, nonprofit, and community-based organizations, particularly those that reach underserved communities. District staff work to promote the grant program to local partners, community groups, and youth-focused agencies. Past youth grantees include organizations such as Saved by Nature, Pie Ranch, San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory, Coastside Land Trust, UC Elkus Ranch and Vida Verde Nature Education.

***Internships (2009 to present)***

Since 2022, the District has offered 13 internships across different departments including Natural Resources, Planning, Public Affairs and Administration Services. In most cases, interns have a maximum of 950 internship hours and are compensated for their work. District interns are also enrolled in the regional internship forum, Next Gen, where they hear from panels of public sector professionals about their career paths and advice on how to maximize their internships. The District will continue to offer internships across different departments.

***Spaces & Species Program (2002 to present)***

Spaces & Species is a free field trip program offered to third through fifth grade students. The program is designed to reach 650 students a year over the course of 25 field trips offered during the spring and fall. Staff work with Volunteer Outdoor Education Docents (OED) to plan, schedule, and coordinate these field trips. OEDs led a group of 30 students maximum with adult chaperones on a guided walk at Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve, including a visit to the David C. Daniels Nature Center. This program offers children an opportunity for experiential environmental education and to understand the benefit of open space. In the Spring of 2023, 10 field trips were held reaching 256 youth as a return to programming since COVID-19.

	<b>2019 (pre-COVID-19)</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>Spring 2023</b>
Number of students	355	126	256
Number of field trips	14	5	10
Outdoor Education Docent hours	293	156	284

*Note: No data available for 2020 and all of 2021 as field trips were cancelled due to COVID-19.*

***Sponsorships for Youth Organizations (2020 to present)***In 2022 and 2023, one-time annual sponsorships (under \$2,500 for each event) have been granted to the following youth organizations to support events with a nexus to the District's mission: La Honda Educational Foundation, Outdoor Afro's Glamp Out, Puente's Fall Harvest Celebration, Saved by Nature's BAT Fest, San Jose Conservation Corps + Charter School's annual benefit, Silicon Valley Bike

Coalition family rides to District preserves, The HEAL Project's Spring Ahead and Vida Verde's annual benefit.

### ***Youth Category in District Photo Contest (2018 to present)***

The District has hosted an annual photo contest since 2008. The photo contest encourages community members to visit a preserve and submit photographs based on a variety of categories. In 2018, the Public Affairs department added a youth category (grades 6-12) and promoted the contest to middle school and high schools within the District via a flyer. Between the 2019, 2020 and 2021 District photo contests, a total of 44 entries have been received in the Aspiring Photographers category. The winners of the youth category in the last photo contests have been highlighted in Midpen's Fall *Views* Newsletter. Public Affairs staff will continue to offer the youth category in future photo contests, including the current 2023 contest.

### ***Youth Pilot Program (2019 to 2023)***

In 2019, the District started a Youth Pilot Program focused on bringing youth and families from local community groups to District preserves. The goal was to introduce these youth-focused community groups to the District's preserves, promote environmental stewardship, and foster a love for nature in young minds. The program was formally adopted by the Board as part of the Youth Outreach Plan approved by the Board in 2020. The program was put on hold during the pandemic and reintroduced in 2022 when Coastside Childrens of Half Moon Bay received a \$2,500 allowance to transport 20 children with chaperones to Purisima Creek Redwoods. The second program was held in June 2023 with Midpen partner, Puente, received a \$2,500 allowance to bring 20 members of their youth program on a docent-led hike in Skyline Ridge. Lastly, six programs were led by Interpretation & Education program staff and volunteer docents for Siena Youth Center at Skyline Ridge in June and July 2023 to 76 students.

### **Future Partnerships**

In 2023 and beyond, the District will be working closely with partner agencies to offer new youth programming.

### ***Los Altos High School (Fall 2023)***

District staff is in conversation about a potential field trip planned in fall 2023 at Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve with students in the special education program from Los Altos High School. If this field trip is successful, this could be another future youth partnership.

### **Changes to Programming Delivery**

The Board Directors approved a Youth Outreach Plan in August 2020. The Youth Outreach Plan's objective is to increase outreach, engagement, and education to youth to foster knowledge and appreciation for nature, conservation, and land management. The target audiences are youth ages 5-21 residing within District boundaries, particularly in under-resourced communities.

As part of that plan, Public Affairs staff began a Youth Pilot Program piloting partnerships with youth outreach organizations representing under-resourced communities to help build both connection to the outdoors for kids and outdoor education capacity in not-for-profit organizations serving youth. Staff identified four youth groups potentially interested in joining a pilot: Fresh Lifelines for Youth (FLY), Puente, Siena Youth Center (SYC) and Coastside Childrens offering each group \$2,500 (for a total District investment of \$10,000) to cover programmatic materials, coordination, and transportation expenses for at least one engagement per group.

The Youth Pilot Program was put on hold during the height of the pandemic and relaunched in 2022. Since the relaunch, staff has conducted one program each with Coastside Childrens and Puente, and six programs with Siena Youth Center (staff was unable to re-establish a connection with Fresh Lifelines for Youth). These programs required in-depth collaboration and communication with the Interpretation & Education Program staff in the Visitors Services department to build engagement events for these organizations that are guided, educational experiences.

With the Youth Pilot Program coming to an end in 2023 and after reflecting on these programs, Public Affairs and Visitors Services staff agreed that programs primarily led by Interpretation & Education Program staff and volunteers should live in Visitor Services department. This would increase the success of these programs to take these educational experiences to the next level. Under this model Visitor Services would continue offering more regular and ongoing programming (more than 1 program/year) with youth partners. Public Affairs will continue to assist community partners, focused on youth or other target audiences, that already have programming expertise to provide public educational programs through our community outreach program.

### ***Next Steps for Youth Pilot Program***

Visitor Services will continue implementation of the Youth Outreach Plan through formalizing programming with youth partners in the Youth Pilot program as the “Youth Partnership Program”. Transferring the coordination and communication of program details (dates, scope of program, student needs, etc.) and funding information from Public Affairs to Visitor Services staff will create a more streamlined approach in planning outdoor educational opportunities for the District’s youth partners.

The Environmental Education Specialist will help lead and support Outdoor Education Docents in providing youth programming. The Environmental Education position contributes to the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) efforts in developing and delivering culturally mindful programs to meet the needs of audiences that represent the diversity of the Bay Area.

The goal of the District’s youth partnership programming is to continue the relationships and programming with the same internal and external organizations and continue to expand upon partnerships, as staff and docent support and resources allow. Staff will find organizations that fit criteria for becoming a youth partner, considering a balance of represented organizations on bayside and on the Coastside.



Support from Public Affairs staff will continue through highlighting the programming through social media and sharing any existing and current partnership contact information.

Interpretation & Education program staff in the Visitor Services department will provide a summary update to the Board every two years of progress made on meeting the Youth Partnership Program goals that include significant accomplishments and milestones. Metrics will include how many youths are involved in programming and the percentage of low-income communities and communities of color. Additionally, staff will create a feedback form to receive the perspectives of program participants in order to continue to offer high-quality and positive program experiences for the youth in the open spaces.

### FISCAL IMPACT

There are sufficient funds in the FY24 budget to cover the cost of the recommendations.

The costs associated with providing these youth engagement opportunities are listed below and were included in the FY2022-23 operating budget.

<b>External Partnerships</b>	<b>Approximate Annual Cost &amp; Hours</b>
Environmental Volunteers	Staff (8 hours) and docent time (20 hours)
Grassroots Ecology	\$102,000
Latino Outdoors	\$44,000
San Jose Conservation Corps & Charter School	Up to \$200,000 in contract
Santa Clara County Library District	Staff (10 hours) and docent time (80 hours)
Save the Redwoods League	Staff (20 hours) and docent time (50 hours)
Siena Youth Center	\$2,500 from Youth Pilot Program budget
<b>Internal Partnerships</b>	<b>Approximate Program Annual Cost</b>
Community Outreach Events	Staff time (450 hours)
Community Presentations	Staff time
Daniels Nature Center	Staff (60 hours) and docent time (800 hours)
Docent Naturalist Program	Staff (150 hours) and docent time (4500 hours)
Environmental Education Specialist School Visits	Staff time (50 hours)
Grantmaking Program	\$250,000 for all grantees, including selected youth grantees
Internships	\$216,380
Spaces and Species Program	Staff (150 hours) and docent time (300 hours)
Sponsorships for Youth Organizations	\$15,500
Youth Category in District Photo Contest	Staff time (60 hours)
Youth Pilot Program	\$10,000 (\$2,500 each for 4 organizations)

**PRIOR BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW**

- February 5, 2019: Legislative, Funding & Public Affairs Committee-Youth Engagement Briefing to ([R-19-15](#), [minutes](#))
- July 7, 2020: Legislative, Funding & Public Affairs Committee-Review of Youth Outreach Plan ([R-20-70](#))
- August 12, 2020: Board Approved the Youth Outreach Plan ([R-20-88](#), [minutes](#))

**PUBLIC NOTICE**

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

**CEQA COMPLIANCE**

This item is not a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act.

**NEXT STEPS**

With the close out of the Youth Pilot Program, Public Affairs will hand off ownership of implementing elements of the Youth Outreach Plan to Visitor Services under a Youth Partnership Program.

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