



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

R-25-56
April 29, 2025

AGENDA ITEM 2

AGENDA ITEM

Beatty Parking Area and Trail Connections Project at Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS *se den*

Based on new information and progress made to date in moving forward the Alma Bridge Road Newt Passage Project and the realities of its projected implementation schedule, review and consider forwarding to the Board of Directors for their consideration one of the following options as the preferred option for the Beatty Parking Area and Trail Connections Project:

- Option 1: Implement the Beatty parking area and trail improvements in phases, beginning with a small, seasonal, permit-only parking area until the adjacent Alma Bridge Road Newt Passage Project improvements are implemented. This approach includes site-specific design features for the parking area and trail that protect newts during their seasonal migration.
- Option 2: Implement the Beatty parking area and trail improvements in phases per Option 1 above and contribute funding to complete the final design and construction of a specific portion (Zone 2a) of the Alma Bridge Road New Passage Project, which fronts the Beatty property.
- Option 3: Continue to defer the Beatty Parking Area and Trail Improvements Project until the entire Alma Bridge Road New Passage Project is implemented, postponing the completion of a conservation easement condition and a Measure AA commitment.

SUMMARY

The goal of the Beatty Parking Lot and Trail Connections Project (Beatty Project), which is located off Alma Bridge Road, is to plan, design, and construct a new staging/parking area and a connecting trail to the Priest Rock Trail in Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve. As scoped, this project meets two separate commitments: (1) a conservation easement condition made to Santa Clara County (County) affecting the underlying property that requires the trail connection, and (2) a Measure AA commitment to provide public access in the Cathedral Oaks area of Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve. The Beatty Project was originally initiated in 2020 but deferred by the Board of Directors (Board) due to concerns of newt mortality on the adjacent Alma Bridge Road, a public County roadway, until the issue is better understood.

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) has since partnered with multiple organizations and agencies to complete a newt mortality study and is working with the County Roads Department on the Alma Bridge Road Newt Passage Project to identify viable options for protecting the newt population in this area. With the desire for the design of both projects to inform one another and provide more seamless newt protection in the area, reinitiation of the Beatty Project was discussed with the Board during the development of the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget and Action Plan (CIAP) and was ultimately added to the CIAP. With a design solution now identified for the Alma Bridge Road Newt Passage Project, District staff have begun to rescope the Beatty Project design to be better integrated with the proposed roadway improvements and to incorporate the recommended northern realignment of the parking area driveway. Moreover, with more concrete information known regarding the duration and cost for the Alma Bridge Road Newt Passage Project, staff have prepared several possible implementation options for the Beatty Project (presented in this report) for review and guidance by the Planning & Natural Resources Committee.

BACKGROUND

Project History

In 2008, the District purchased the Beatty Trust property as an addition to the Preserve. The County contributed \$950,000 toward the purchase (R-08-14) and in exchange, the County granted the District a conservation easement over the property obligating the District to construct a trail from the new property to the Priest Rock Trail in the Preserve within fifteen years from the date the easement was recorded (March 11, 2008). The County granted a five-year extension to the District to complete the trail by April 18, 2028.

The property is located on the easterly side of Alma Bridge Road and Lexington Reservoir, approximately two miles east of the Alma Bridge Road exit from Highway 17. It is surrounded by Lexington Reservoir County Park to the north, west, south and partially to the east. The Lexington Reservoir County Park property is owned by Santa Clara Valley Water District and operated by Santa Clara County Parks (County Parks). County Parks also operates the Miller Point parking lot and picnic grounds located across Alma Bridge Road. San Jose Water Company land borders a portion of the property on the east (Attachment 1).

The site is characterized by gently sloping terrain, oak woodlands, and meadows, and can be accessed via District Preserve Gates SA40, 41, and 42, as well as a remnant road cut and gate across from Miller Point. Several existing structures (including the Beatty House) and two wells are present on the site, along with remnant road cuts and relatively level grassland areas (Attachment 2). Existing biological, historic, and cultural resources are predominately located in the southern portion of the site and include two unnamed drainages that flow to Lexington Reservoir, bat roosting habitat associated with the Beatty House structure, and woodrat nests in various locations around the property (Attachment 3).

Within this region, the District has been working collaboratively with partners to form a continuous greenbelt of permanently preserved open space by linking District lands with other public parklands. As part of this work, the District also contributes to regional trail connectivity, which includes the Bay Area Ridge Trail (Ridge Trail). The Project aims to provide a key staging area for visitors accessing the Ridge Trail via the Priest Rock Trail and to connect to

other trails within the Preserve and/or head northwest toward the future Highway 17 trail crossing (managed as a separate project) to access trails west of Highway 17. During the 2012 vision planning process, the public identified the Cathedral Oaks area as a priority for public access, now identified as Vision Plan Priority Action #22. The parking area and trail project is also part of Measure AA Portfolio #22 (Sierra Azul: Cathedral Oaks Public Access and Conservation Projects), which includes: “*Develop multi-use trail... Develop parking... Install trailside amenities.*” The parking area was originally envisioned to include approximately 20 to 30 vehicle spaces, 4 to 6 horse trailer spaces, and a vault toilet.

Planning and Natural Resources Committee (PNR) and Board Review

The Beatty Parking Area and Trail Connections Project has previously been presented to the PNR Committee and Board as summarized in the table below:

8/28/2019	<p>Board Meeting: Board awarded a multi-year contract with LSA Associates, Inc., for environmental review services.</p> <p>Agenda Packet: 20190828 - Agenda Packet - Board of Directors (BOD) Meeting Minutes: 20190828 - Minutes - Board of Directors (BOD)</p>
1/14/2020	<p>PNR Meeting #1: PNR visited the property to familiarize themselves with the site and its opportunities and constraints, and to gain an understanding of the Project scope. PNR provided early feedback on program elements such as the preferred access driveways, where to place the parking, and how many equestrian trailer parking spaces to minimally provide, and asked staff to explore the possibility of partnering with County Parks on the use of their Miller Point parking lot*. PNR also requested information regarding ongoing newt mortality on Alma Bridge Road based on concerns received from the Audubon Society.</p> <p>Agenda Packet: 20200114 - Agenda Packet - Planning and Natural Resources (PNR) Meeting Minutes: 20200114 - Minutes - Planning and Natural Resources (PNR)</p> <p><i>*Please refer to Attachment 4 regarding exploration of the Miller Point Parking Area for District visitor use and the conclusion that this is not a viable option.</i></p>
8/4/2020	<p>PNR Meeting #2: PNR reviewed a reduced Project program/scope that scaled down the project to a small, 7 to 8-space seasonal permit lot. The permit lot and connecting trail would be closed during the rainy season when newts are known to seasonally migrate to and from Lexington Reservoir to breed. PNR recommended deferral of project to allow time for analysis of the newt population.</p>

	Agenda Packet: 20200804 - Agenda Packet - Planning and Natural Resources (PNR) Meeting Minutes: 20200804 - Minutes - Planning and Natural Resources (PNR)
9/23/2020	<p>FYI Memo to Board: Summarized the outcomes of the August 4, 2020 PNR meeting. PNR advised the General Manager to defer the Project until the District and stakeholders complete a population and mortality study (newt study) for the California newts (<i>Taricha torosa</i>) and rough-skinned newts (<i>Taricha granulosa</i>) for the area (R-20-104). In response to the memorandum, the Board requested to bring this item forward for full Board consideration.</p> <p>Agenda Packet: 20200923 - Agenda Packet - Board of Directors (BOD) Meeting Minutes: 20200923 - Minutes - Board of Directors (BOD)</p>
1/13/2021	<p>Board Meeting: The Board received a presentation on the Beatty Parking Area and Trail Connections Project Options and voted to defer the Project until completion of a newt study to incorporate its findings.</p> <p>5-2-0 (Directors Cyr and Siemens dissenting)</p> <p>Agenda Packet: 20210113 - Agenda Packet - Board of Directors (BOD) Meeting Minutes: 20210113 - Minutes - Board of Directors (BOD)</p>

Once the project was deferred to await the completion of a newt study, District staff worked with the County to extend the agreement that required the District to construct the trail connection from the property to the Priest Rock Trail. This amended agreement now obligates the District to complete construction of the trail connection by April 18, 2028.

Since 2021, the District has taken steps to better understand the newt mortality issue by working with project partners, including the County and Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST), to conduct a multi-year newt mortality study along Alma Bridge Road. This study found the need for and informed the development of a Feasibility Study and Alternatives Analysis / Basis of Design for roadway improvements under the separate Alma Bridge Road Newt Passage Project. These studies and analysis identified viable alternatives to improve the public roadway along the frontage of the Beatty Property and included a recommendation to realign the driveway for the new parking area to the north, across from Miller Point County Park, to reduce the vehicle distance required to reach the site.

DISCUSSION

In 2024, informed by new findings and recommendations coming from the Alma Bridge Road Newt Passage Project, the District began taking initial steps to rescope the previous conceptual design plans for the Beatty Parking Area. In doing so, the District has identified the following implementation options for the Beatty Parking Area and Trails Project that are now being

presented to PNR for their review and selection of a preferred option to forward on for full Board consideration.

Option 1: Phased Implementation

Option 1 would implement the Beatty Parking Area and Trail Connections Project in phases, beginning with a small, seasonal permit-only parking area (Attachment 5) while the District and partners work to secure funding for the implementation of public roadway improvements under the Alma Bridge Road Newt Passage Project. Under Option 1, the parking area and trail connection would be closed during the newt migration season to protect migrating newts until the newt passage improvements are implemented along the public roadway. Moreover, during the initial phase, the permit-only parking would be small in size (number of spaces to be confirmed at a future date) with few site improvements and be largely composed of gravel where feasible to minimize the level of site disturbance. Full build out of the Beatty parking area (Phase II – may include equestrian trailer parking) would not commence until the newt passage improvements along the roadway are constructed.

Pending forthcoming updates to the technical studies for the project, this approach may also include the following conceptual plan refinements, which would enhance the user experience and align the project with the District's established *Staging/Parking Area and Trailhead Design Guidelines* to further promote ecologically sensitive public access to the preserve:

- **Access & Siting:** Consistent with recommendations from the Newt Passage Project, the driveway for the Beatty parking area would shift northward, directly across from the Miller Point lot, to reduce the vehicle distance traveled along Alma Bridge Road. The new driveway alignment would lead directly to an adjacent relatively flat grassy area that requires minimal grading to establish the permit parking area. By locating the driveway and parking to the north of the property, visitor use is shifted away from other biological (bats, drainages, woodrats) as well as historic and cultural resources (Beatty House) found on the property for their added resource protection. A preliminary line-of-sight analysis for the new driveway indicates that there is an adequate line of sight and turning radius for vehicle ingress and egress.
- **Site-Specific Design Features for Newts:** Under Option 1, the project would incorporate site-specific design features for the protection of newts within District lands that are compatible with and similar to the proposed newt passage improvements proposed along the adjacent public roadway. These features are anticipated to include a low vertical barrier around the perimeter of the parking lot and newt passages below the driveway and parking area to allow newts to safely move through or around the project area.
- **Additional Site Programming & Amenities:** By utilizing the relatively flat, grassy area of the site, the parking area is anticipated to accommodate both standard vehicles (Phase I) and equestrian trailer parking (Phase II), as well as basic amenities to enhance the preserve visitor experience, such as an overlook, staging/gathering area, and interpretive signage that describes the cultural, historic, and/or biological resources of the site and region, including California newts.
- **New Trail Alignment:** In shifting the parking area northward, a revised trail alignment has been identified that creates new opportunities for visitors to experience the various

habitats and vistas of the Beatty property on an approximately two-mile-long trail segment before accessing the remainder of the preserve via the Priest Rock Trail (Attachment 6). It may also be feasible to create a secondary, shorter loop trail experience via the Priest Rock Trail with the addition of a half mile trail segment, providing another way for visitors to experience the Preserve. Note: regardless of the trail alignment, the trail improvements require an encroachment permit through Valley Water land and would utilize an existing easement across San Jose Water Company lands.

Option 1 allows the District to move forward with the Beatty Parking Area and Trail Connections Project with protective measures on District lands to account for newt migration patterns. Option 1 balances established priorities/obligations across multiple projects, including satisfying the District's agreement with the County to build the trail connection and meeting its Measure AA commitment of enhancing public access in this area of the Preserve. Concurrently, the District would continue to work with the County to secure funding for the implementation of the Alma Bridge Road Newt Passage Project.

Option 2: Phased Implementation and Funding Contribution to complete Newt Passage Project Improvements along the section of roadway (Zone 2a) fronting the Beatty Property

Option 2 would implement the Beatty parking area and trail improvements in phases per Option 1 above and include a funding contribution towards the final design and implementation of roadway improvements along the section of Alma Bridge Road that fronts the Beatty Property as recommended by the Alma Bridge Road Newt Passage Project, referred to as Zone 2a (Attachment 7). Although Zone 2a is a low priority zone for the Newt Passage Project, the early implementation of these roadway improvements can be pursued as a pilot project, with post-construction monitoring results providing important species-specific data regarding the use and passage preferences of California newts that can better inform the design of other roadway segment improvements. This information can increase the effectiveness of the more extensive and costly roadway improvements, which are currently based more on data of other amphibian species due to a lack of sufficient data specific to newts. The estimated design and construction cost for the Zone 2a roadway improvements is approximately \$500,000.

Option 2 allows the District to move forward with the Beatty Parking Area and Trail Connections Project with specific protective measures on District lands to account for newt migration patterns while also kick-starting a segment of Alma Bridge Road improvements to serve as a pilot project. The Zone 2a improvements can bring in additional critical data and findings to inform the design for the remaining roadway improvements identified in the Alma Bridge Road Newt Passage Project.

The parking area portion of the Beatty project is a District project on District public land, whereas the Newt Passage Project will ultimately be a County Roads project within the County owned Alma Bridge Road. The District has previously allocated significant investments in time and funding to the Newt Passage Project to better understand the newt mortality issue and has helped to identify potential solutions to protect the local newt population. A funding contribution to complete the Zone 2a roadway improvements aligns with the District's prior actions and with the goal of protecting local native species populations.

The District currently has sufficient funding to support both the Beatty project and completion of newt crossing improvements along Zone 2a of Alma Bridge Road. The remainder of the Newt

Passage Project will predominantly need to be funded by grants, private fund raising, and/or County funding.

Option 3: Continued Deferral of Project
















Option 3 continues to defer the Beatty Parking Area and Trail Improvements Project until a portion of or the entirety of the Alma Bridge Road Newt Passage Project is implemented. Under this scenario, the District would continue to support County Roads in the final design, implementation, and post-construction monitoring of the Newt Passage Project.

The timeline associated with deferral of the Beatty project is indefinite and may be extensive due to the need for significant grant funding to construct all segments of roadway improvements under the Newt Passage Project. The total costs are projected to be \$35,000,000. Funding may also be more challenging for this project since the California newt is not currently a state or federal listed species and grant funding opportunities and priorities are rapidly evolving at this time.

Deferral would require the District to request an additional indefinite time extension from Santa Clara County Parks to build the trail connection. Also, to meet the Measure AA commitment, the District would need to defer the project by no more than 10 to 15 years in order to complete the work by 2044, when all Measure AA commitments are to be completed. Finally, deferral would increase the direct implementation costs for the parking area and trail given the realities of inflation over time.

Option Comparison

The following comparison table summarizes the relative effectiveness of each option in achieving the overarching obligations and priorities for the Beatty Parking Area & Trail Connections Project and surrounding area:

Option	Fulfills County Trail Connection Agreement	Fulfills Measure AA Public Access Commitment	Supports & Prioritizes California newt Conservation	Cost Effectiveness	Timely Implementation
1 – Phased Implementation					
2 – Phased Implementation & Newt Passage Project Support					
3 – Continued Deferral of Project					

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no immediate fiscal impact associated with the recommendation. PNR is reviewing, providing feedback, and considering forwarding a preferred option for the Beatty Parking Area and Trail Connections project to the full Board.

The following table summarizes the different options and the associated estimated costs.

Option	Ballpark Design & Construction Cost	Funding Source
1 – Phased Implementation	\$3M (cost does not include trail connection improvements that will be done in-house by District staff)	Measure AA
2 – Phased Implementation & Newt Passage Project Funding Contribution	Phased Implementation: \$3M Newt Passage Support: 500-650k Total: 3.5M – 3.65M	Measure AA
3 – Deferral	Dependent on duration of delay and escalation. Normally, <i>construction</i> escalation is accounted for at a 5% compounded increase per year. Estimated cost for Option 1 at year 10 = \$4.89M	Measure AA (assumes project is completed by 2044)

The following table outlines that there are sufficient funds in the Measure AA Portfolio 22 Sierra Azul—Cathedral Oaks Public Access and Conservation Projects allocation to cover the cost of any of the options above. It also outlines costs-to-date, projected future project expenditures and projected portfolio balance remaining.

MAA22 Sierra Azul—Cathedral Oaks Public Access and Conservation Projects Portfolio Allocation:	\$6,714,000
Grant Income (through FY29):	\$517,701
Total Portfolio Allocation:	\$7,231,701
Life-to-Date Spent (as of 04/16/25):	(\$1,822,729)
MAA22-004 Beatty Parking Area and Trail Connections project costs (projected through FY29)*:	(\$3,896,380)
Total Portfolio Expenditures:	(\$5,719,109)
Portfolio Balance Remaining (Proposed):	\$1,512,592

*Estimate that is included in the upcoming FY26-FY28 Budget & Action Plan, includes future costs as listed in the 3-Year CIAP for the Beatty Parking Area and Trail Connections Project.

The following table outlines the Measure AA Portfolio 22 allocation, projected life of project expenditures and projected portfolio balance remaining.

MAA22 Sierra Azul—Cathedral Oaks Public Access and Conservation Projects Portfolio Allocation:	\$6,714,000
Grant Income (through FY29):	\$517,701
Total Portfolio Allocation:	\$7,231,701

Projected Project Expenditures (life of project):	
22-001 Hendrys Creek Property Land Restoration	(\$513,343)
22-003 Freudenburg Land Purchase	(\$540,587)
22-004 Beatty Parking Area and Trail Connections	(\$3,896,380)
22-005 Beatty House Removal	(\$48,621)
22-006 San Jose Water Lands	(\$720,178)
Total Portfolio Expenditures:	(\$5,719,109)
Portfolio Balance Remaining (Proposed):	\$1,512,592

PRIOR BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

PNR considered this item on January 14, 2020 and August 4, 2020 and is reviewing this item for the third time given new information.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act. In addition, Sierra Azul interested parties, agency partners and advocacy groups, and neighboring private properties along Alma Bridge Road were notified of the public meeting.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

The Project is exempt pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15262, Feasibility and Planning Studies. PNR's recommendation of an preferred alternative for full Board consideration will not result in any physical facilities or improvements proposed to be constructed at the time of the recommendation. CEQA review will be performed after Board selection of an option and subsequent completion of schematic site designs and related technical studies.

NEXT STEPS

Pending PNR feedback and selection of a preferred option, staff will continue to engage with project stakeholders and will present the preferred option to the full Board of Directors for their consideration in Spring/Summer 2025. If Option 1 or 2 is approved, staff will continue to refine the project scope and the conceptual site plan for the project.

In addition, staff will proceed with updating the technical studies for the project, which will inform the upcoming design development and environmental review process. Due to the amount of time that has passed since the project was initiated, and to changes to the geographic extent of the parking area and trail alignment, it is anticipated that the majority of these original technical studies for the project will need to be updated. These technical studies are anticipated to include an updated botanical survey, Aquatic Resources Delineation, Tree Survey, and Biological Resources Assessment, as well as a Phase II Environmental Assessment (ESA) and an updated Transportation Analysis.

The table below provides a tentative project schedule and key milestones if Option 1 or Option 2 is selected:

Milestones	Tentative Schedule*
Stakeholder Engagement & Board Acceptance of Preferred Option	Q4 FY25 – Q1 FY26
Technical Studies, Conceptual Design, & Design Development	Q2 FY26 – Q2 FY27
Environmental Review & Board Approval of Project	Q3 FY27 – Q3 FY28
Final Design, Permitting, Bidding & Construction	Q4 FY28 – Q4 FY30

*Tentative schedule may require an additional limited extension to the County conservation easement condition that obligates the District to construct the trail connection to the Priest Rock Trail.

Attachments

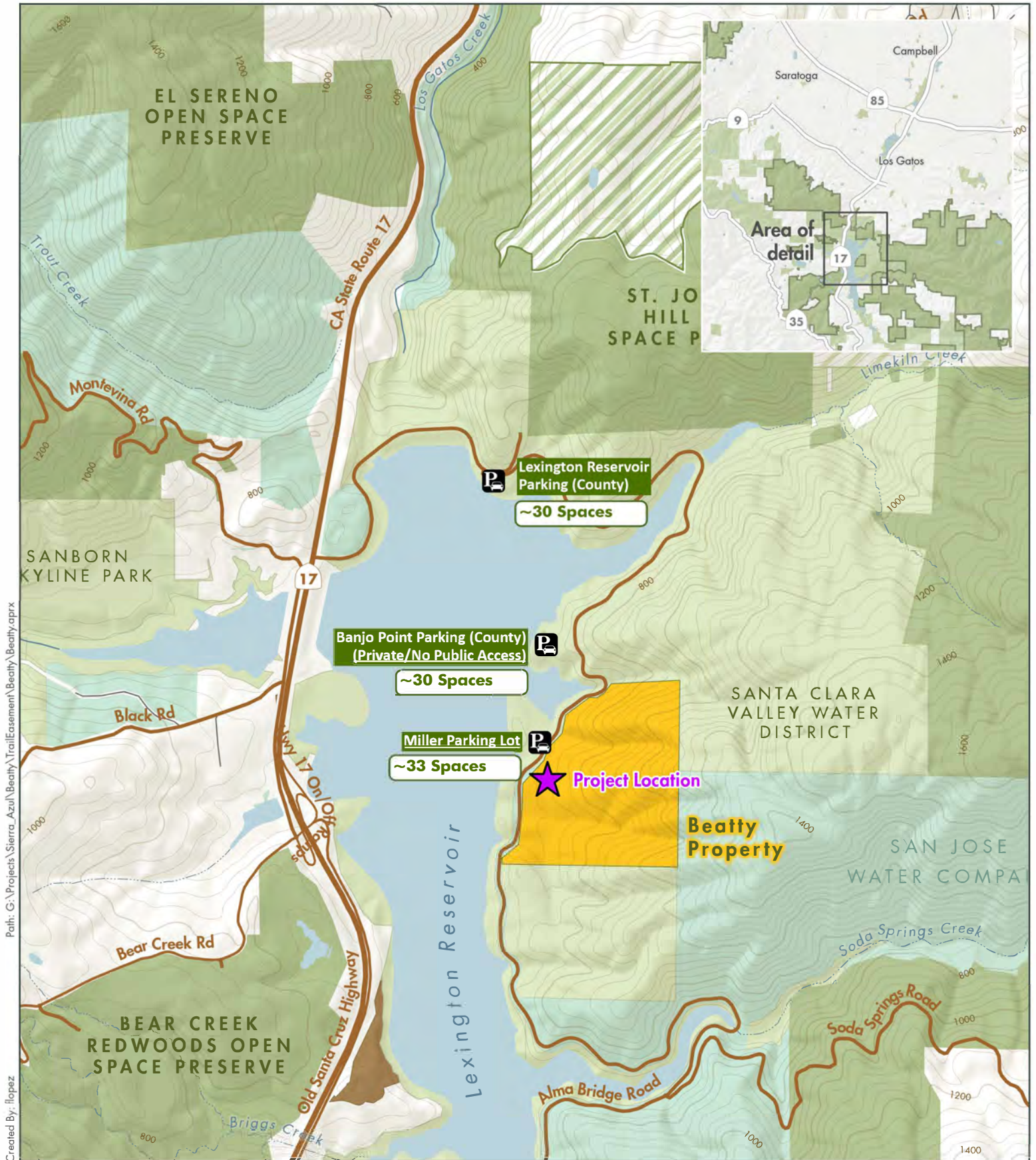
1. Beatty Property Site Map
2. Beatty Property Setting & Topography
3. Beatty Property Existing Resources
4. Miller Point Parking Area Exploration
5. Beatty Property Conceptual Diagram, Option 1
6. Beatty Property Conceptual Trail Alignments
7. Alma Bridge Road Newt Passage Project Priority Zones

Responsible Department Head:

Jason Lin, PE, Engineering & Construction Department

Prepared by / Staff contact:

Mark Brandi, Senior Capital Project Manager, Engineering & Construction



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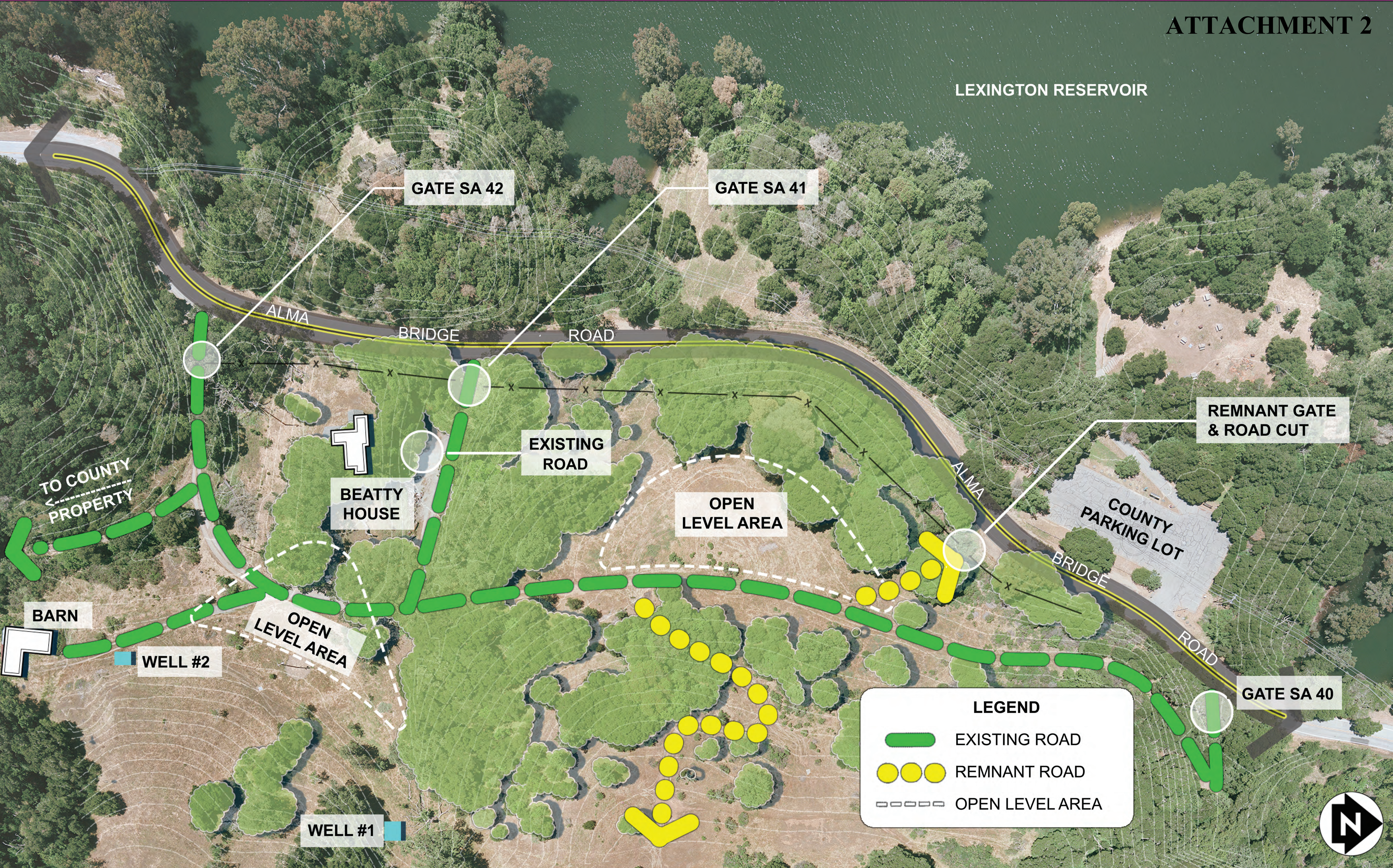
Beatty Property

- Midpen preserves
- Watershed land
- Other protected lands
- Other public agency
- Former Beatty Property

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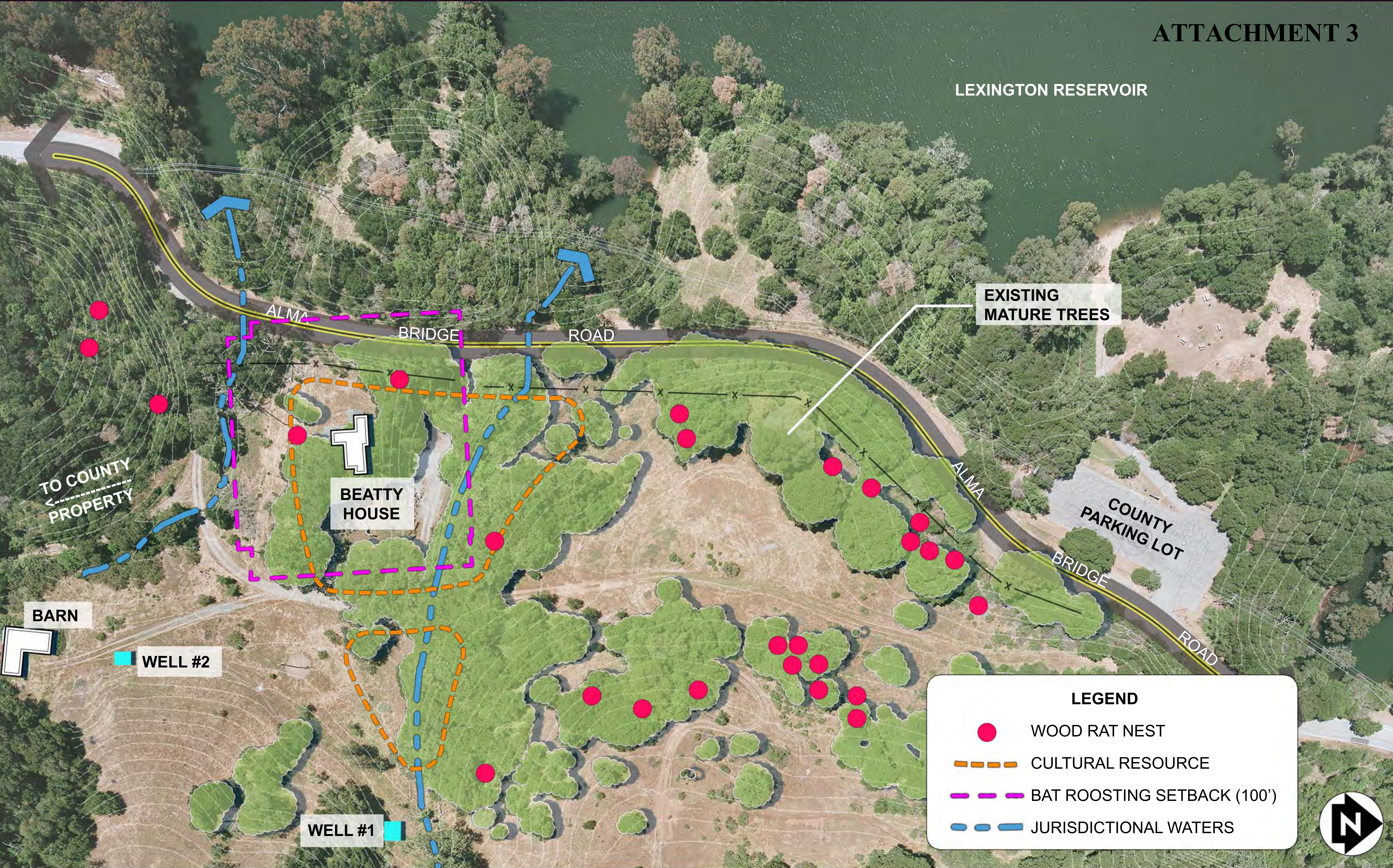
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BEATTY PARKING AREA

SETTING + TOPOGRAPHY



BEATTY PARKING AREA

ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES

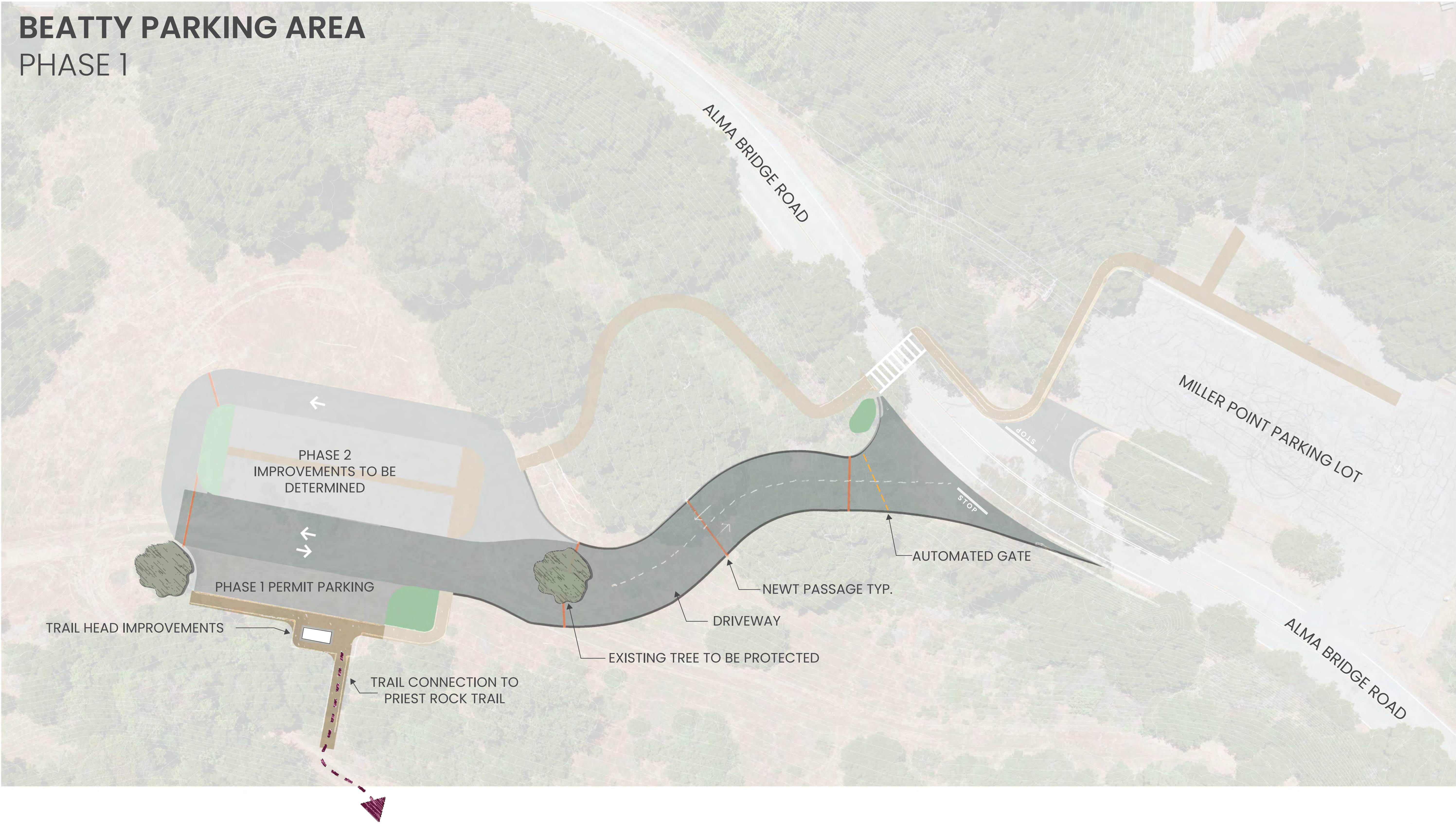
Exploration Regarding Shared Use of the Miller Point Lot

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) staff moved forward with the exploration of a partnership with Santa Clara County (County) to use their Miller Point Parking Area for District visitor use. Interest in this potential was raised by the Planning and Natural Resources Committee in 2020 as a possible option in lieu of constructing a new parking area in the same general area. In this scenario, the District would only implement the trail connection portion of the Beatty project and potentially make certain improvements to the existing parking area, such as vegetative screening and a new restroom facility. In addition, the District would work with County Parks to establish a long-term maintenance and management agreement for the shared use of the facility.

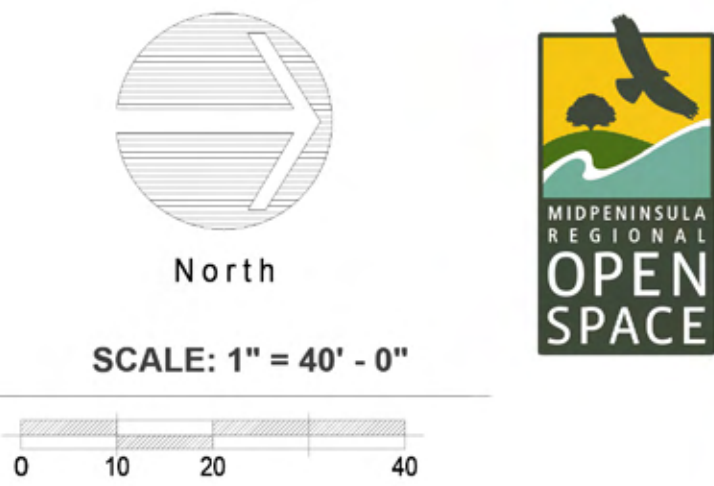
Because the underlying land at Miller Point is not owned by County Parks and is instead leased from the Santa Clara Valley Water District, modifying the entities that utilize the lot would require renegotiation of the existing agreement between County Parks and Valley Water. The County expressed no interest in renegotiating this agreement. In addition, due to projected County budget shortfalls, the County has a need to continue a fee-based parking program at Miller Point. A shared use of the lot with District visitors not paying for parking (consistent with District policy) would limit the County's anticipated revenues associated with this paid parking program.

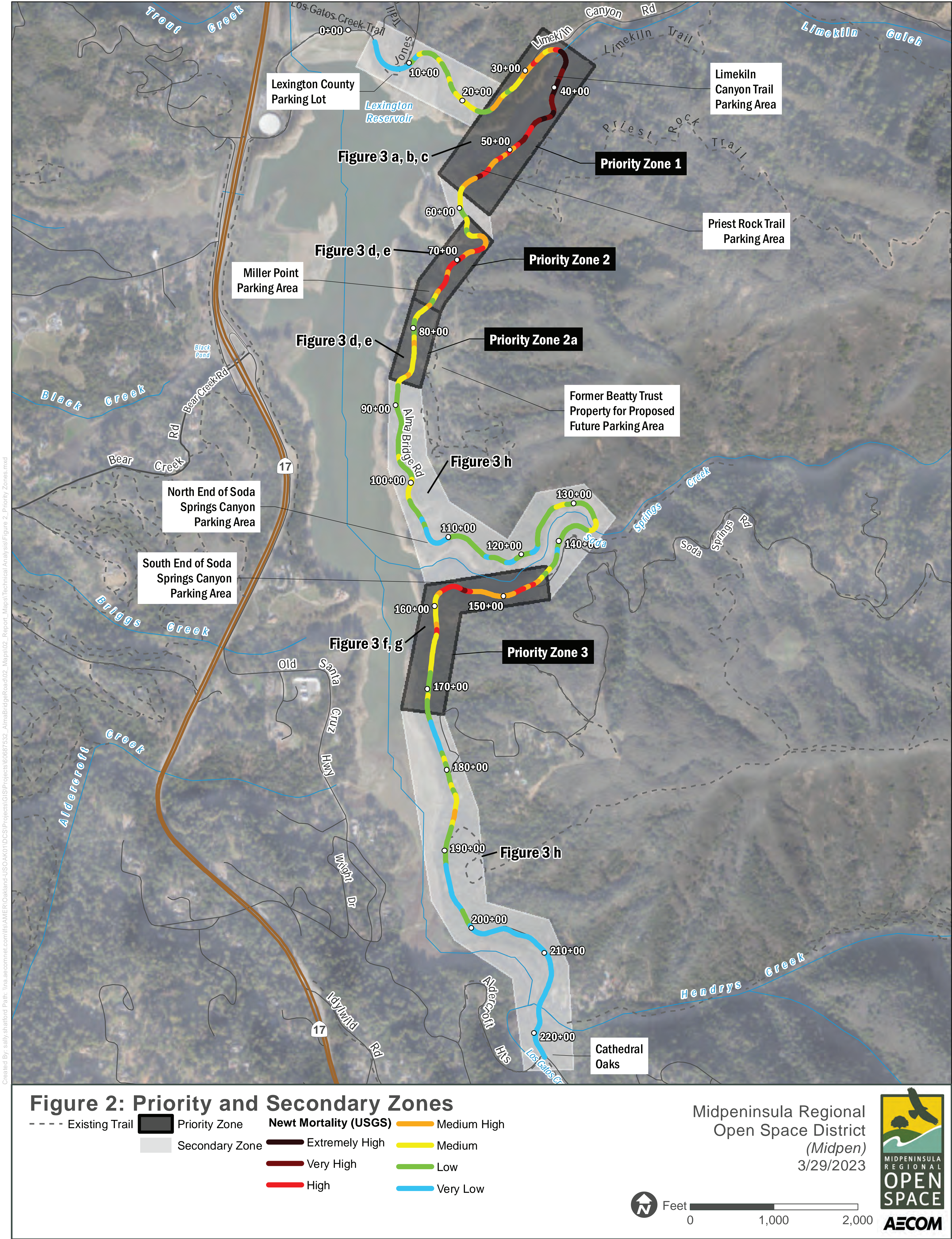
This option has therefore been deemed infeasible by County Parks leadership and inconsistent with District policy regarding parking fees.

BEATTY PARKING AREA
PHASE 1



BEATTY PARKING AREA AND TRAIL CONNECTIONS PHASE 01

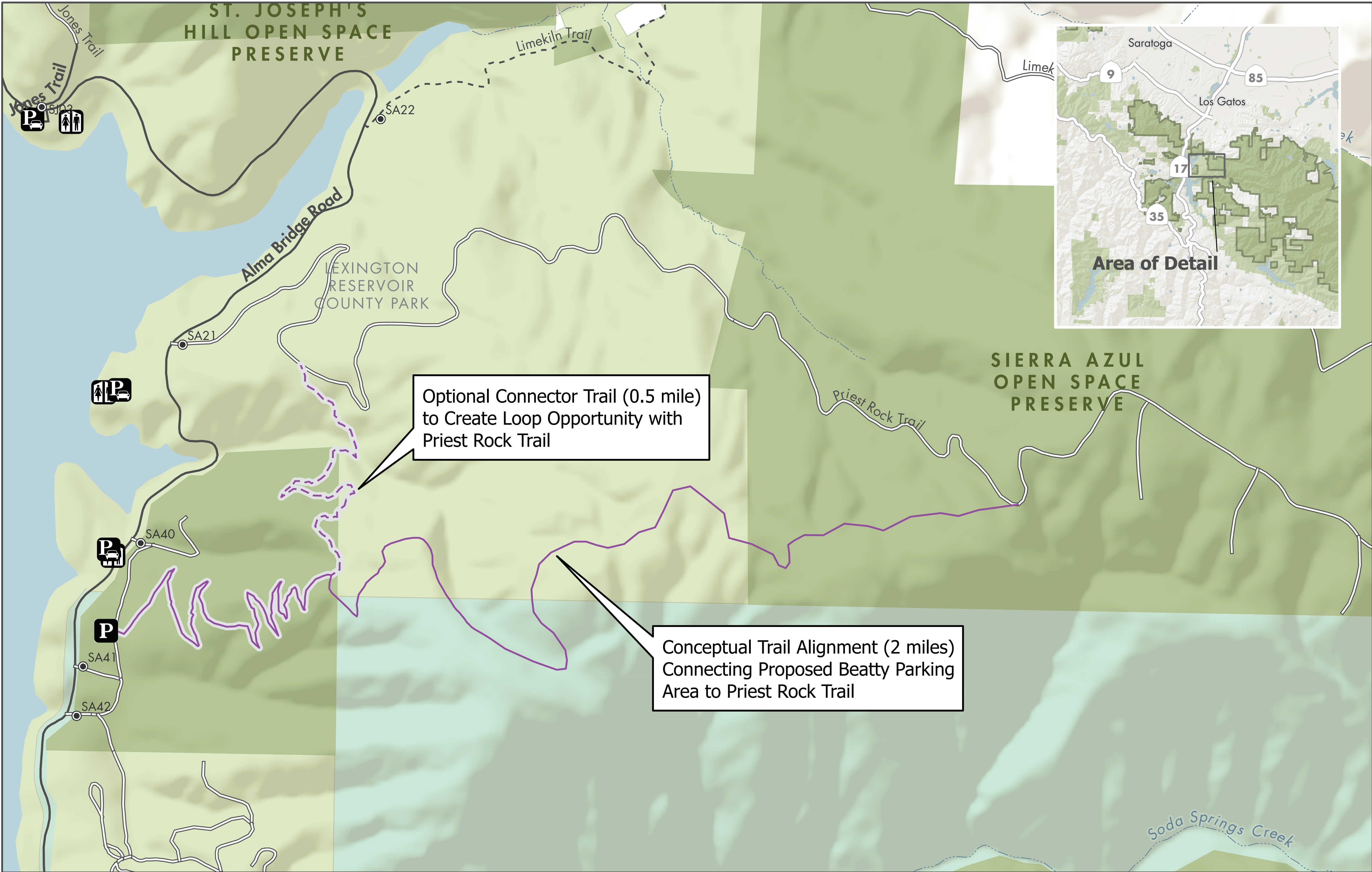




While the District strives to use the best available digital data, these data do not represent a legal survey and are merely a graphic illustration of geographic features.

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Attachment 7 - Beatty Property Conceptual Trail Alignments

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|--|---|--|--|
| | Midpen preserves | | Conceptual Trail Alignment - Four-foot width |
| | Santa Clara County Parks & Valley Water Lands | | Optional Connector Trail - Four-foot width |
| | San Jose Water Company Land | | Alignment Shared with PNR Committee in 2020 |

Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District
(Midpen)
4/24/2025



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