



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

R-26-57
April 27, 2026

AGENDA ITEM 2

AGENDA ITEM

Sensitive Species Protection Planning for Bayfront Preserves

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Receive a presentation and provide feedback on the development of a Sensitive Species Protection Program for Bayfront Preserves.
2. Provide concurrence that the Sensitive Species Protection Program as described is sufficient for staff to release a Request for Proposals to select a consultant for this work. An award of contract would subsequently be brought to the full Board of Directors for review and consideration.

SUMMARY

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) owns and manages two preserves on the San Francisco Bay (Bay): Ravenswood Open Space Preserve (Ravenswood) and Stevens Creek Shoreline Nature Study Area (SCSNSA). These bayfront preserves are home to several State and Federally protected species, including western snowy plover, salt marsh harvest mouse, California least tern, and Ridgway's rail. The District is working on several fronts to protect and support these sensitive and rare species. At SCSNSA, the District is pursuing the SCSNSA Restoration Project, commencing with feasibility studies of various habitat enhancement alternatives to identify the best restoration option that maximizes the ecological value for native species.

The District is also developing a Sensitive Species Protection Program (Program, the subject of this Agenda Item) that would apply to both bayfront preserves and establish a range of management measures for enhancing essential habitat features and reducing the ongoing significant predation risk to support the long-term sustainability of rare and sensitive species populations. This type of species protection work is widely conducted in other bayfront and coastal habitats with a high degree of success to conserve populations of sensitive species. District staff have consulted with partner and stakeholder agencies and organizations to discuss similar efforts and received early feedback on the proposed Program as described in this report. The Planning and Natural Resources Committee (PNR) will have an opportunity to review the proposed concepts of the Program to provide early feedback that will be incorporated into an upcoming Request for Proposals solicitation to select an outside firm that can support the

development of the Program and the preparation of an accompanying Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

BACKGROUND

The Baylands of the South San Francisco Bay (Bay), including District lands, consist of a mosaic of marshes and salt ponds and contain breeding habitat for multiple sensitive species that are listed as either threatened or endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) and/or the California Endangered Species Act (Table 1). Many agencies and entities are working to protect these species and bolster populations through habitat improvements, restoration projects, and direct management of predation pressure, including agencies that are managing wildland habitat zones located to the north and south of the District’s Ravenswood Preserve and SCSNSA.

Table 1 – Sensitive Species Present in District Baylands

Species	Scientific Name	Protection Status
Western snowy plover (plover)	<i>Anarhynchus nivosus nivosus</i>	Federal Threatened, California Species of Special Concern
California least tern (tern)	<i>Sterna antillarum browni</i>	Federal and State Endangered, California Fully Protected
Salt marsh harvest mouse (mouse)	<i>Reithrodontomys raviventris</i>	Federal and State Endangered, California Fully Protected
Ridgway’s rail (rail)	<i>Rallus obsoletus obsoletus</i>	Federal and State Endangered, California Fully Protected

These sensitive species face high predation pressure due to unnaturally inflated predator populations that have been subsidized by human activity and development. The District’s two bayfront preserves are affected by this dynamic, given that they both are within wildland-urban interface zones, immediately adjacent to and just outboard of highly urbanized areas consisting of housing, business, and industrial uses. Populations of local predators such as Common raven (*Corvus corax*;) and California gull (*Larus californicus*) have dramatically increased in the Bay in recent decades. Data collected from the North American Breeding Bird Survey indicate that within the Mediterranean California ecoregion, raven abundance was 14.3 times higher in 2018 than in 1966. Breeding California Gull populations in the San Francisco Bay have boomed since the 1980s, growing by 21,342% from under 200 individuals in 1982 to an estimated 42,884 individuals in 2023. Both species are bolstered by food subsidies related to human activity, including landfills and other unsecured food debris. At their current anthropogenically (human activity) inflated population levels, predation pressure is now capable of eradicating an entire breeding colony of shorebirds in as little as a single day and has resulted in detrimental effects on vulnerable marsh species.

Stevens Creek Shoreline Nature Study Area

SCSNSA is a 55-acre preserve located on the bayfront in Mountain View (Attachment 1). It is adjacent to Stevens Creek but is not hydrologically connected to the creek or the Bay. It functions as a stormwater retention basin for the National Aeronautics and Space Agency (NASA) Ames facility. SCSNSA provides habitat for water birds and migratory species during wet months and habitat for ground nesting birds like plovers when dry enough during the summer. Pickleweed present on site could potentially provide habitat for the mouse and rail. Numerous predator species are present at SCSNSA, documented through in person surveys and

wildlife cameras. Most recently, in 2025, three plover nests were identified and monitored at SCSNSA, two of which were depredated before the eggs hatched, and one was partially depredated after at least one chick hatched. This event is representative of the ongoing predation pressures in Bay habitats.

Through a separate project (SCSNSA Restoration Project) that aims to enhance the health and sustainability of rare and sensitive Bayland species, the District is evaluating various habitat restoration alternatives for the site (R-25-97). The types of sensitive species supported by this effort will depend on the selected alternative. The level of success of this habitat restoration project in increasing the populations and stability of sensitive species will greatly depend on supplemental actions to control the unnaturally high levels of predation. The proposed Sensitive Species Protection Program will be essential in managing predation pressure to successfully increase sensitive species populations and prevent a mortality sink in which predation (mortality) increases with sensitive species abundance.

Ravenswood Open Space Preserve

Ravenswood is a 376-acre preserve located in the Bayfront area of East Palo Alto (Attachment 1). The preserve is hydrologically part of the Bay and provides active and muted tidal marsh habitat. It is a former salt pond site that was restored to a tidal marsh in 2000. Ravenswood provides valuable habitat for mouse, rail, and migratory birds. The protected species in this preserve are likely predated by similar predator species as those found in SCSNSA based on historical case studies documented by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in similar Bay habitats, ongoing species monitoring by external entities, and the proximity of location and similar urbanized surroundings. In 2000, a tidal marsh restoration project was completed at Ravenswood, breaching the former outboard levee to successfully reintroduce tidal flow to the site. In 2019, refuge islands were constructed as part of the Ravenswood Bay Trail project to provide suitable protected habitats above high tides for sensitive species. At present, the San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority is leading the design of a shoreline levee with associated habitat modifications, including mitigation for snowy plover.

DISCUSSION

Numerous rare and sensitive species inhabit bayfront Preserves (refer to list of species in Table 1) face unrelenting pressure from increased predator populations, which is a significant limiting factor for sensitive species recovery. These species are legally protected under the ESA and given the level of predation loss, merit active management actions to support their survival and population recovery. The District is proposing to prepare a Sensitive Species Protection Program (Program) that will provide programmatic guidance with graduated levels of active management actions to reduce predation pressures. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) environmental review process for this Program is expected to result in the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) that will analyze any potential environmental impacts associated with implementing the proposed Program.

Based on extensive research and discussions with regulatory agencies, sensitive species protection will require a comprehensive effort to manage both habitat quality and predation

pressure. Agencies in the San Francisco Bay and in other coastal habitats across California, Washington, and Oregon have implemented similar longstanding, comprehensive and successful sensitive species protection programs. This two-pronged approach to improve habitat quality and manage predation pressure is ecologically necessary due to the intense predation, and the diversity and complexity of predator-prey interactions. Moreover, the creation of a “toolbox” of graduated management actions as part of the Program is understood to best meet the sensitive species protection objectives by “custom fitting” each situation and each predator issue in real time.

The proposed Program would include both proactive and reactive measures for each preserve. Proactive measures would be implemented on an ongoing basis to reduce predation risk. Examples of these measures may include monitoring, fencing, trash removal, public education, removal of predator perches, dismantling of predator nests, etc. Additionally, proactive measures specific to domestic/feral cats that may be present on the preserves would include humane capture and relocation to local animal rescue organizations, as well as removal/relocation of nearby cat feeding stations and public education to keep pet cats indoors.

Reactive measures would be implemented on an as-needed basis, informed by monitoring, evidence of repeat predation, and/or other acute indicators. Reactive measures would be applied to the specific scenario and, when appropriate, target problematic individual predators and/or predator species. Reactive measures would first include non-lethal treatment through hazing and behavior modification to change behaviors. If necessary, lethal removal of select problematic common species or individuals that are present in unnaturally high numbers may be considered, such as ravens, gulls, skunks, rats, house mice, and raccoons. All proposed measures would be fully analyzed as part of the CEQA review.

Early Outreach and Engagement

During the exploration and scoping phase of the proposed Program planning effort, staff conducted outreach to a variety of federal, state, and local partner and stakeholder groups with neighboring ownership of Bayfront property, and who hold subject matter expertise in managing sensitive species. This effort was conducted to provide early notification and engage in discussions regarding the proposed Program development and create an opportunity for information exchange. The entities engaged in this phase of outreach included:

- National Aeronautics and Space Administration
- Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge, US Fish and Wildlife Service
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife
- San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory
- East Bay Regional Park District
- South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project
- Santa Clara Valley Bird Alliance (formerly Audubon Society)
- Sierra Club – Loma Prieta Chapter’s San Francisco Bay Alive Campaign
- City of East Palo Alto
- City of Mountain View
- City of Palo Alto
- Animal Care Organizations

During this outreach, staff presented the District's goal of the proposed Program to protect special status species located in its Bayfront preserves with an accompanying thorough CEQA review.

General feedback from this outreach is summarized as follows. Environmental partners expressed support and/or understanding for the proposed Program with the acknowledgement that high predation is a systemic problem. They also acknowledged that efforts of this nature can be a sensitive topic, but that management and implementation of these efforts can be very effective for protecting sensitive species. Environmental partners recommended a broad and holistic approach with multiple tools available to fit different scenarios, enabling staff to determine in real time which tools are most appropriate to use in a particular situation. Environmental partners urged caution on the management of domestic cats and recommended partnering with animal care organizations and working with concerned communities to reach mutual goals. No specific concerns or objections were raised about the District's implementation of the proposed Program.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this recommendation. Future efforts, including the preparation of a Sensitive Species Protection Program and associated CEQA review, will be included in future board reports.

PRIOR BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

None

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act. In addition, staff have conducted ongoing coordination and provided notification of the meeting to the stakeholders engaged in the effort listed in the previous section.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

The Committee's action associated with providing input on a Proposed Program is not considered a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Potential environmental effects of the Proposed Program will be evaluated pursuant to CEQA when a Sensitive Species Protection Program and associated CEQA documentation are prepared.

NEXT STEPS

- Summer 2026 - After obtaining early feedback from the PNR, staff will submit a FYI Memorandum to the full Board of Directors describing the scope and intent of the Program and recapping the work completed to date.
- Summer 2026 - Staff will distribute a RFP to solicit consultant services.
- Fall 2026 - Board of Directors (Board) will consider approval of an award of contract for consultant services to begin developing the Program and perform CEQA review.

- Late 2027/early 2028 – Board will consider approving the proposed Program and certifying the CEQA environmental review document.

Attachments

1. District Bayfront Preserves

Responsible Department Head:

Jane Mark, Planning Manager

Kirk Lenington, Natural Resources Manager

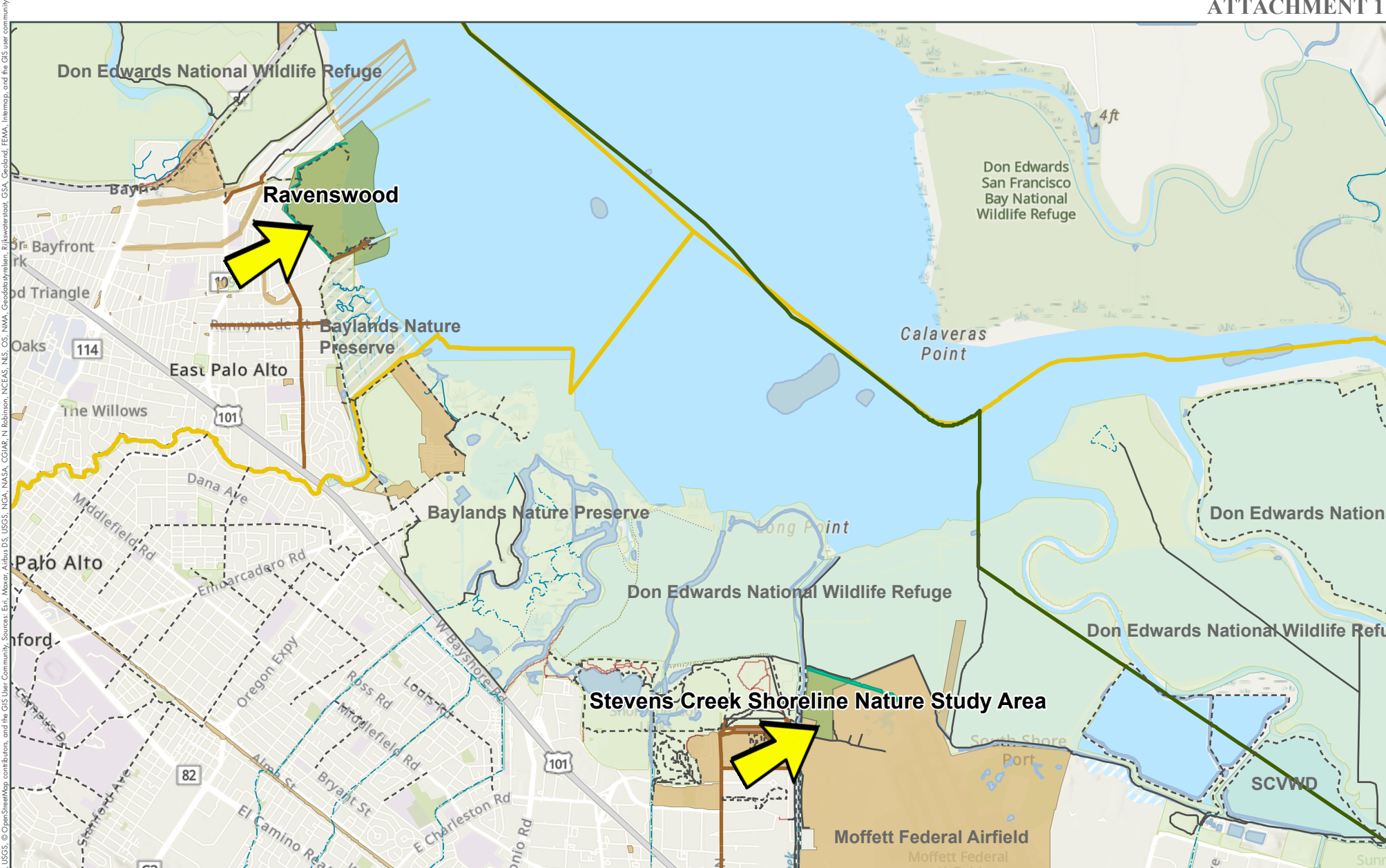
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Midpen Bayfront Preserves

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| <p>Stream</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perennial Intermittent <p>Building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present <p>Trail</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paved Road | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unpaved Seasonal Road Trail Abandoned / Unmaintained Trail <p>District Boundary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> District Boundary County Boundary | <p>Waterbody</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active Pond Active Wetland Preserve Boundary <p>Open Space</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-MROSD Easement Over Other Open Space | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Non-MROSD Easement Over Private; Non-MROSD Easement Over Public Non-MROSD Easement Over Private; Non-MROSD Easement Over Public Non-MROSD Easement Over Water Other Protected Open Space Other Public Agency Public Watershed Land |
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Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District
10/10/2025



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