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Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District Board Votes to Preserve the Radar Tower atop Mount Umunhum

Los Altos, CA—In a special meeting on June 8, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (Midpen) Board of Directors voted unanimously to keep the five-story, decommissioned Air Force radar tower atop Mount Umunhum in the Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve.

The Board also voted to accept donations from the general public for the repairs to and ongoing maintenance of the tower. In the last year, Midpen has spent nearly \$400,000 in general funds on interim repairs to make the tower safe for visitors to the Mount Umunhum summit.

“It is a straightforward decision that our board makes tonight” said Yoriko Kishimoto, Midpen Board President, “We have sympathy for those who use the radar tower as a physical landmark and cherish its history and we welcome private donations to help us repair and maintain it.”

In 2012, the Midpen Board voted to postpone any decision on the tower until October 2017 to give the public the opportunity to experience the mountain with the tower in place and to give private parties time to raise funds for tower preservation. However, a unanimous May 10 vote by the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors to place the tower on the County Heritage Resource Inventory effectively ended that process.

Other components of Midpen’s plan for Mount Umunhum will continue as planned, including opening the summit and interpreting the site’s unique natural, Native American and military histories.

In operation for 22 years, the tower was part of a network of hundreds of Cold War-era radar stations that scanned for enemy aircraft. The radar sail at the top of the tower was removed by the Air Force when the Almaden Air Force Station at the summit was decommissioned and the radar program ended. The mountain is named for the hummingbird, a key figure in the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and all Ohlone peoples’ creation story, which began at that summit over 10,000 years ago. The mountain is home to unusual, high-altitude plant habitats, and is an ideal regional destination for nature lovers and outdoor recreationalists.

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Created by voter initiative in 1972, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District has successfully protected more than 62,000 acres of open space. The District is a California special district governed by an elected board of directors. The District's mission is to acquire and preserve a regional greenbelt of open space land and agricultural land of regional significance in perpetuity, protect and restore the natural environment, and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education.

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