



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

R-21-65
May 18, 2021

AGENDA ITEM 3

AGENDA ITEM

Hawthorns Area Plan – Overview of the Proposed Planning Process

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Receive an informational presentation on the proposed planning process for the Hawthorns Area Plan, which includes the following elements:
 - Overview of the Hawthorns Area
 - Key resources and other site considerations
 - Potential formation of a working group
 - Visioning and goal-setting process
 - Planning timeline and next steps
2. Provide input and guidance on the planning and public engagement process. No formal Committee action required.

SUMMARY

The Hawthorns Area Plan (Plan) would provide a comprehensive plan for the Hawthorns Area of Windy Hill Open Space Preserve (Hawthorns Area), located in the Town of Portola Valley (Town) and owned and managed by the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District). This comprehensive use and management plan would prescribe future uses and management activities at the Hawthorns Area. The proposed planning process for this effort involves multiple phases to engage the Planning and Natural Resources Committee (PNR), full Board of Directors (Board), and broad community, beginning with the development of vision and goals for the entire Hawthorns Area.

The District is proposing to hold a series of PNR meetings with multiple opportunities for early public comment during the first phase of the planning process. This first PNR meeting will present existing conditions, describe key themes associated with the Hawthorns Area, and introduce the proposed visioning and goal-setting process. Subsequent PNR meetings would lead to drafting the Hawthorns Area vision and goals for consideration by the Board. The public will have opportunity to comment at all PNR and Board meetings and via a virtual comment card currently available on the project website at <https://www.openspace.org/our-work/projects/hawthorns-public-access>.

Staff is exploring the potential formation of a working group to provide another venue for public input. The working group would engage perspectives, interests, and values that reflect the full

range of Midpen's regional constituency, including local neighbors, environmental organizations, and user groups.

The planning process would culminate in the development of a conceptual plan that the Board would consider approving as the project description to initiate California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review and Town permitting. As part of the planning process, the District would also prepare a comprehensive use and management plan to prescribe future uses and management activities at the Hawthorns Area.

DISCUSSION

Property Overview

The 79-acre Hawthorns Area is located near the intersection of Alpine Road and Portola Road, and is one of the last remaining islands of open space in the Town. The property is bounded by Alpine Road to the west, Los Trancos Road to the east, and private property to the north and south. The property is accessible from two driveways on Alpine Road and Los Trancos Road. Improvements to the Hawthorns Area include residential structures, farm buildings, landscaping, and ranch roads. Some structures date back to the late 1800s, when a prominent San Francisco judge acquired the property and constructed a residence, carriage house, and several ancillary buildings near Los Trancos Creek. The cluster of buildings and structures near Los Trancos Creek is informally called the Historic Complex.

Property Acquisition

In 2006, the Board accepted the Hawthorns property from the Woods Family Trust as the largest private land gift received by the District at that time. The Woods Family Trust generously donated their property to preserve it as public open space in perpetuity. The property officially transferred to the District in 2011 as the Hawthorns Area of Windy Hill Open Space Preserve. The Hawthorns Area is subject to a conservation easement granted in 2005 by the Woods Family Trust to the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST). The conservation easement allows low-intensity recreational uses and related development that aligns with improvements typically offered on other District preserves, such as unimproved trails, split rail fences, parking areas, and directional signage. Other forms of development are generally restricted by the conservation easement. Because POST holds the conservation easement, their participation throughout the planning process will be key in ensuring consistency with the terms stipulated in the conservation easement.

Preliminary Use and Management Plan

At the time of property acquisition, the District prepared a Preliminary Use and Management Plan (PUMP) to establish land management activities. The Board adopted a PUMP for the Hawthorns Area in 2006 (R-06-53) and a PUMP amendment in 2012 (R-12-46). Since 2012, District staff have implemented a number of actions prescribed by the PUMP, including the following:

- Secured existing structures against trespass and vandalism
- Established an on-site employee presence
- Implemented a plan for wildland fire management and defensible space safety
- Conducted grassland restoration and invasive species management
- Evaluated long-term management options for the Historic Complex

The PUMP included a future action to study the feasibility of providing public access and connecting to existing trail networks. The first step in preparing a long-term use and management plan for the property, including a plan for public access, is to develop the vision and goals for the property for Board consideration and adoption; the vision and goals would guide all future planning efforts and be developed as part of this first phase of Plan development.

Vision Plan

In 2014, the Board approved 54 priority actions in the Open Space Vision Plan that prioritized conservation and management efforts throughout the District's jurisdiction; the Hawthorns Area is included under Vision Plan Priority #6: Windy Hill, which states the following actions that are specific to the Hawthorns Area:

“Open Hawthorns Area, develop trails connecting to Portola Valley and Palo Alto trails. Explore partnerships to protect, restore, and interpret historic buildings. Improve habitat conditions in Los Trancos Creek.”

The public supported this Vision Plan priority in 2014 when it voted for the passage of Measure AA, a \$300M general obligation bond to fund the top 25 Vision Plan Priority Actions. The total expenditure plan for the Windy Hill Measure AA Portfolio is \$12,740,000 of which approximately \$1.7 million can be allocated to the Hawthorns Area.

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

Cultural Resources

The Hawthorns Area was once the site of a year-round family residence, a summer retreat, and small-scale agricultural production. In 2013, the District retained Knapp Architects to prepare a [Historic Resource Study](#) for the Hawthorns Area, which concluded that the property is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district because it retains landscape features and structures that reflect the social, agricultural, and architectural history of San Francisco Peninsula estate property in the late 19th century.

Elements of the historic district include remnant landscaping, an old olive grove, infrastructure like fencing and water tanks, the internal system of unimproved roads, various ancillary structures, and four original main buildings, constructed in the following order and located in a zone known as the Historic Complex: 1) a large barn, 2) a cottage, 3) the main house, and 4) a garage/carriage house. A newer residence and asphalt driveway constructed in the mid-1950s and currently used as a District residence, while within the Hawthorns Area, do not contribute to the historic district.

An archaeological survey conducted in 2018 determined that the Hawthorns Area contains sensitive Native American resources. District staff will coordinate with local tribal representatives to ensure appropriate protections for these resources.

Plan discussions with the PNR would include management considerations for these cultural resources and how public access component may best interface with the historic district.

Natural Resources and Wildland Fire/Vegetation Management

Oak woodland extends through the Hawthorns Area in an east-west direction and transitions into a mixed evergreen forest along Los Trancos Creek. Los Trancos Creek flows year-round and meanders along the eastern edge of the Hawthorns Area. The Los Trancos creek corridor

supports a diverse community of plants and wildlife and provides spawning habitat for the threatened steelhead trout. Remnants of an olive orchard occupy the hillsides west of Los Trancos Creek. Wildlife corridors to the south and east connect the Hawthorns Area to vast areas of open space along Page Mill Road and Skyline Boulevard.

Ongoing grassland management includes timed mowing of invasive yellow star thistle at the Hawthorns Area. The District's Natural Resources Department is working with contractors to perform grassland monitoring for informing the best timing to mow the invasive, non-native weeds to promote native plant generation. Volunteers also actively remove highly flammable French broom, especially along roadways.

Scenic Resources

The Hawthorns Area landscape is largely comprised of grassland hillsides and scenic ridgetops that afford panoramic views of Portola Valley, the San Francisco Peninsula, the East Bay hills, and the Santa Cruz Mountains. Hillsides within the Hawthorns Area are visible from adjacent Town neighborhoods. Alpine Road, which borders the western boundary, is a designated Scenic Corridor. The Town's 2001 Alpine Scenic Corridor Plan protects the natural beauty along Alpine Road and limits development that would visually affect this corridor.

Alpine Road

The Alpine Road corridor carries substantial vehicle, bicycle, equestrian, and pedestrian traffic and is one of two major arterials through the Town. According to the Town's [Trails and Paths Element](#) in their General Plan, the following portions of Alpine Road adjacent to the Hawthorns Area are officially designated as part of the Town's trail and path network:

- **Bicycle Route:** Alpine Road from Los Trancos Road to Saddleback Drive.
- **Bicycle Path:** On the north side of Alpine Road from Los Trancos Road to Portola Road.
- **Equestrian/Hiking Trail:** On the south side of Alpine Road from Los Trancos Road to Portola Road (see Lower Alpine Road Trail, below).
- **Multi-Use Corridor:** On the south side of Alpine Road from Portola Road to Saddleback Drive (see Lower Alpine Road Trail, below).

Lower Alpine Road Trail

Lower Alpine Road Trail is a multi-use trail that travels along the south side of Alpine Road from Ladera to the Alpine Road / Portola Road intersection. This facility is frequently used by equestrians, hikers, cyclists, and children traveling throughout the community. Between Los Trancos Road and Saddleback Drive, Lower Alpine Road Trail is an unpaved path that meanders along the northern Hawthorns Area property boundary and is separated from Alpine Road by a vegetated berm. The Town has requested that the District and Town work together to realign and widen portions of Lower Alpine Road Trail adjacent to the Hawthorns Area; this planning process will incorporate the requested realignment as part of the trail development.

Trail Connectivity

The Town's 2003 General Plan envisioned a comprehensive trail and path system throughout the Town that interconnects with conceptual trails for the Hawthorns Area, as identified in the Town's Trails and Paths Element. Local trail connection opportunities include Alpine Road Trail and Sweet Springs Trail. In addition, the Hawthorns Area may potentially contribute to regional trail connections with other nearby public open spaces, including the Pearson-Arastradero Preserve, Foothills Park, Coal Mine Ridge Nature Preserve, and the Stanford Dish Area.

Planning Process

Planning for future public access at the Hawthorns Area would begin with an understanding of the existing conditions to establish the vision and goals for the property. Ultimately, draft vision and goals would be forwarded to the full Board for their review and approval. The vision would describe how the Hawthorns Area should look and function into the future, consistent with the District's mission, which is: *"To acquire and preserve a regional greenbelt of open space land in perpetuity, protect and restore the natural environment, and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education"*. The vision would be supported by goals that define allowable uses and management strategies. Together, the vision and goals represent a comprehensive roadmap for the Hawthorns Area.

Due to the local history and community interest, the District anticipates high public involvement throughout the vision and goals process. Outreach efforts would invite the Town, local community groups, residents, and neighbors to provide verbal or written comments as part of PNR and Board meetings, and via a [virtual comment card](#) currently available on the Hawthorns Area webpage.

The vision and goals would set the framework for evaluating elements that can be incorporated into a conceptual comprehensive use and management plan, including potential parking location(s), trail location(s), guidelines for connecting with nearby public trail networks, resource management actions, wildland fire management activities, and other use and management considerations for the Hawthorns Area.

The District is exploring the potential formation of a working group to provide another venue for public input. The working group would engage perspectives, interests, and values that reflect the full range of Midpen's regional constituency, including local neighbors, environmental organizations, and user groups. The working group would provide an interactive forum for District staff and community stakeholders to identify the opportunities and constraints associated with opening the Hawthorns Area to public access in a manner consistent with the Board-approved vision and goals; therefore, a working group would best be integrated into the planning process once the vision and goals are approved by the Board. The broader public would have additional opportunities to comment throughout the working group process. The PNR is asked to provide initial feedback regarding the inclusion of a potential working group and is welcome to raise questions for staff to address or further research and return with responses at a subsequent PNR meeting.

When ready, the PNR would forward the conceptual comprehensive use and management plan to the Board of Directors for consideration. This conceptual plan would serve as the basis to conduct environmental (CEQA) review and initiate the permitting process with the Town. Refer to the Next Steps section for upcoming planning actions and a tentative project schedule.

FISCAL IMPACT

This informational presentation on the planning process has no immediate fiscal impact. Once the Board adopts the vision and goals for the Hawthorns Area, funding for the planning process and future years implementation activities will be requested as part of the annual Budget and Action Plan process.

The following table outlines the Measure AA Portfolio #6 Windy Hill: Trail Implementation, Preservation and Hawthorns Area Historic Partnership allocation, costs-to-date, projected future Project expenditures and projected ending balance at the portfolio level.

MAA06 Windy Hill: Trail Implementation, Preservation and Hawthorns Area Historic Partnership Portfolio Allocation:	
Total Portfolio Allocation:	\$12,740,000
Life-to-Date Spent (as of 04/16/2021):	(\$40,674)
Encumbrances:	(\$20,575)
Remaining FY21 Project Budgets:	\$20,000
Future MAA06 project costs (projected through FY23):	(\$102,000)
Total Portfolio Expenditures:	(\$143,249)
Portfolio Balance Remaining (Proposed):	\$12,596,751

The following table outlines the Measure AA Portfolio #06 Windy Hill: Trail Implementation, Preservation and Hawthorns Area Historic Partnership allocation, costs-to-date, projected life-to-date project expenditures and projected portfolio balance remaining.

MAA06 Windy Hill: Trail Implementation, Preservation and Hawthorns Area Historic Partnership Portfolio Allocation:	
Total Portfolio Allocation:	\$12,740,000
Projected Project Expenditures (life of project):	
MAA06-001 Hawthorn Parking Lot Concept Design	(\$8,490)
MAA06-002 Hawthorns Public Access Site Plan and CEQA	(\$134,759)
Total Portfolio Expenditures:	(\$143,249)
Portfolio Balance Remaining (Proposed):	\$12,596,751

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act. Additional notice of this May 18, 2021 PNR meeting was distributed to the following groups:

- Town residents, schools, and businesses
- Ladera community residents
- Local agencies including Town of Portola Valley, Town of Woodside, and Woodside Fire
- Neighbors within 1,000 feet of Windy Hill Open Space Preserve including Hawthorns Area
- Parties interested in information about the Windy Hill Open Space Preserve

CEQA COMPLIANCE

Presentation on a recommended planning process for the Hawthorns Area is not a project subject to the CEQA.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS

Milestone	Purpose	Anticipated Schedule
PNR Committee Meeting #1	Introduce the proposed planning process; discuss existing conditions, key themes, and resources at the Hawthorns Area; describe the purpose of vision and goals; discuss concept of a working group.	May 18, 2021
PNR Committee Meeting #2	Review and refine draft vision and goals; consider whether to include a working group in the public engagement process.	Summer 2021
PNR Committee Meeting #3	Review and refine final draft of vision and goals and if ready, consider recommending these to the full Board for their consideration; finalize any adjustments to the public engagement process and forward to the Board for their consideration.	Fall 2021
PNR Committee Meeting #4	Additional meeting, if necessary, to finalize recommendations that are forwarded to the Board.	Early 2022
Board Meeting #1	Approve vision and goals and public engagement process.	Early 2022
Board Meeting #2	Approve working group membership and formation	Mid 2022

ANTICIPATED TIMELINE

The following table outlines the tentative schedule for developing the Plan.

Milestone	Calendar Year
Vision and Goals (PNR Committee and Board)	2021-2022
Conceptual plan development and review (District Committee and Board; Town Commissions/Committees)	2022-2024
CEQA review	2024-2025
Project approval and permitting	2025

Attachments

1. Hawthorns Area Fact Sheet

Responsible Department Head:

Jane Mark, Planning Department

Prepared By:

Alex Casbara, Planner III, Planning Department
Meredith Manning, Senior Planner, Planning Department
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Contact Person:

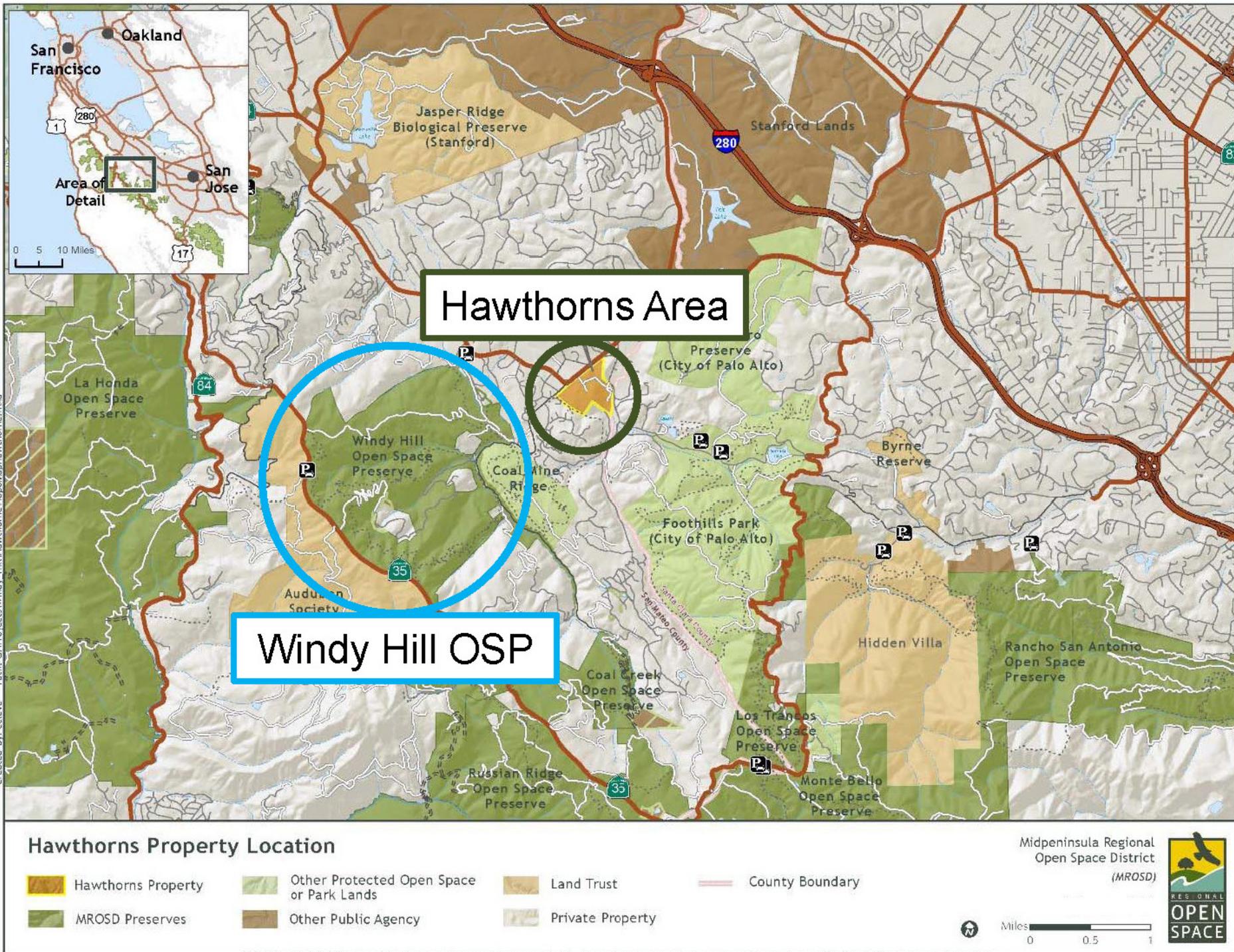
Alex Casbara, Planner III, Planning Department



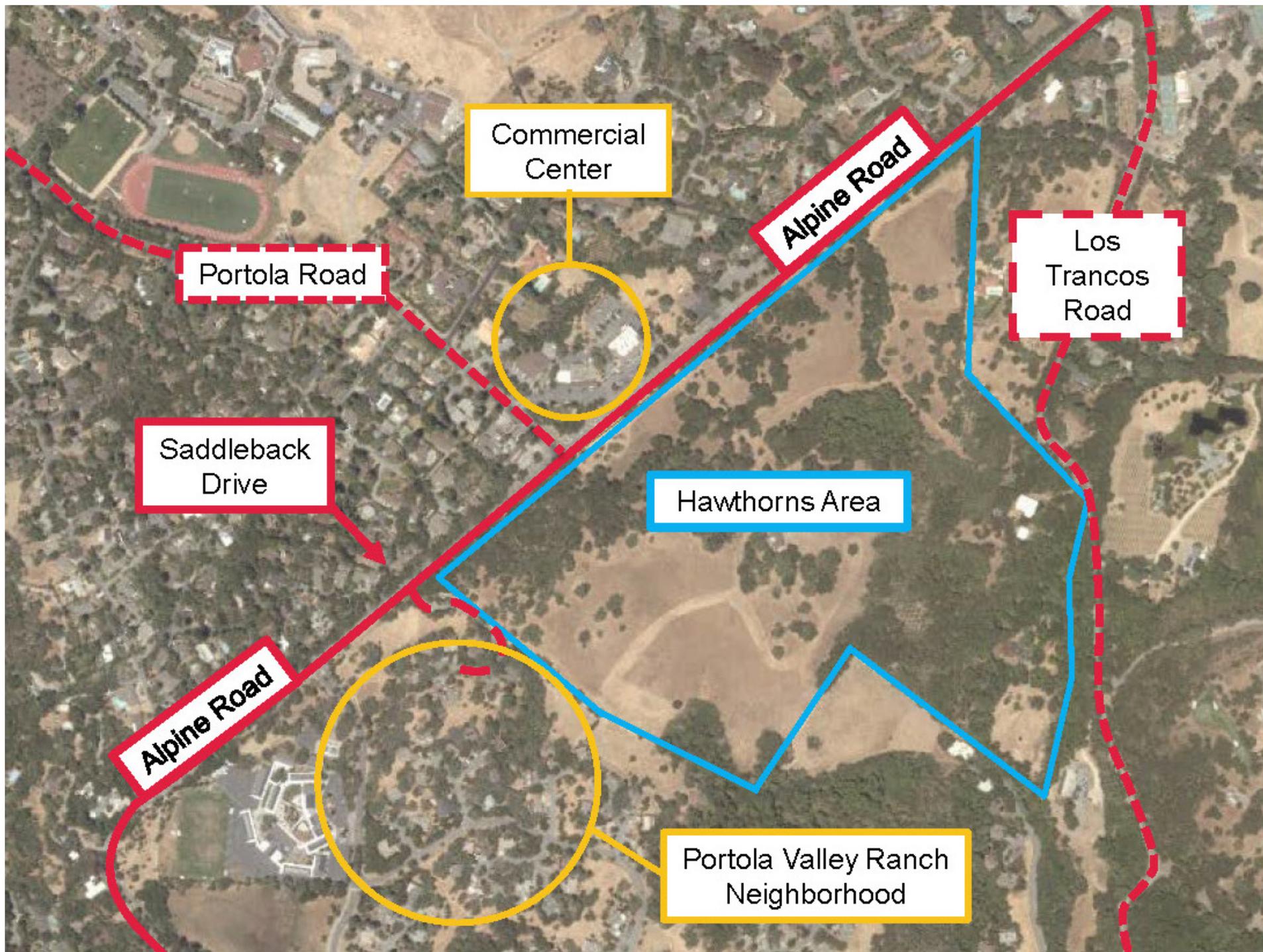
Fact Sheet: Hawthorns Area of Windy Hill Open Space Preserve

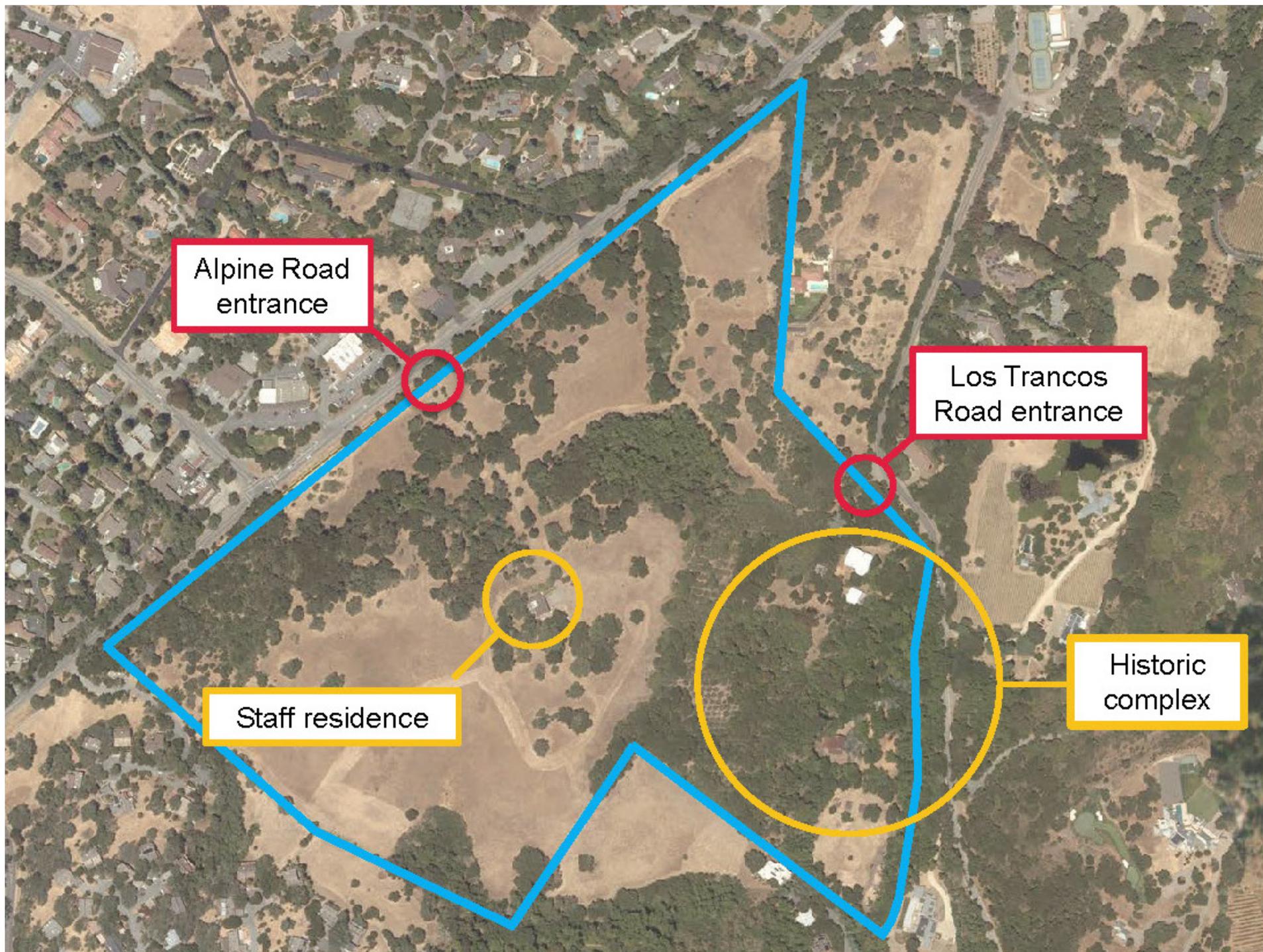
In 2006, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (Midpen) accepted the Hawthorns property from the Woods Family Trust as the largest private land gift received by Midpen at the time. The Woods Family Trust generously donated their property to preserve it as public open space in perpetuity. The property officially transferred to the Midpen in 2011 as the Hawthorns Area of Windy Hill Open Space Preserve.

Size	Approximately 79 acres
County	San Mateo County
City	Town of Portola Valley
Location	Near the intersection of Alpine Road and Portola Roads
APN	079-080-050, -080, and -090
Status	The Hawthorns Area is currently closed to public access
General Plan Land Use	Residential Open Space Preserve
Zoning	Residential Estate (R-E)
Adjacent Land Uses	The Hawthorns Area is surrounded by private residential land uses and a commercial area located across Alpine Road. Parks and open space near the Hawthorns Area include Windy Hill, Town of Portola Valley Coal Mine Ridge, and City of Palo Alto Pearson-Arastradero Preserve and Foothills Park.
Landscape	Grassy hilltops and ridges within the Hawthorns Area afford panoramic views of Portola Valley, the southern San Francisco Peninsula, and the Santa Cruz Mountains. The property is highly visible from surrounding neighborhoods, parks, and open space lands.
Flora and Fauna	Grasslands, oak woodlands, and evergreen forests provide a rich landscape for local wildlife and protected species including ferruginous hawk, California newt, and San Francisco dusky-footed woodrat, among others. Wildlife corridors connect the Hawthorns Area to vast areas of surrounding natural lands within the Santa Cruz Mountains and foothills.
Hydrology	Los Trancos Creek flows year-round along the eastern property boundary. This creek corridor supports a diverse community of plants and wildlife, including spawning habitat for the threatened steelhead trout.
Alpine Road	Alpine Road travels along the northern property boundary and is a primary transportation route through the Town of Portola Valley. Alpine Road includes two automobile lanes and wide shoulders for a bicycle route. A separated bicycle path travels along the north side of Alpine Road. An unpaved pathway (known as Lower Alpine Road Trail) travels along the south side of Alpine Road, parallel to the northern boundary of the Hawthorns Area. Alpine road is also a designated scenic corridor.
History	The property was originally developed as a summer estate by a prominent San Francisco family in 1888 and many of the original buildings remain. Most of the historic structures are in fair to poor condition. Orchards and vineyards were farmed on the estate, and parts of an olive orchard remain. Later, horses and hogs were kept on the property. The entire 79-acre property is eligible for listing as a historic district on the National Register of Historic Places. The cluster of buildings and structures in the eastern portion of the Hawthorns Area is informally known as the Historic Complex.



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

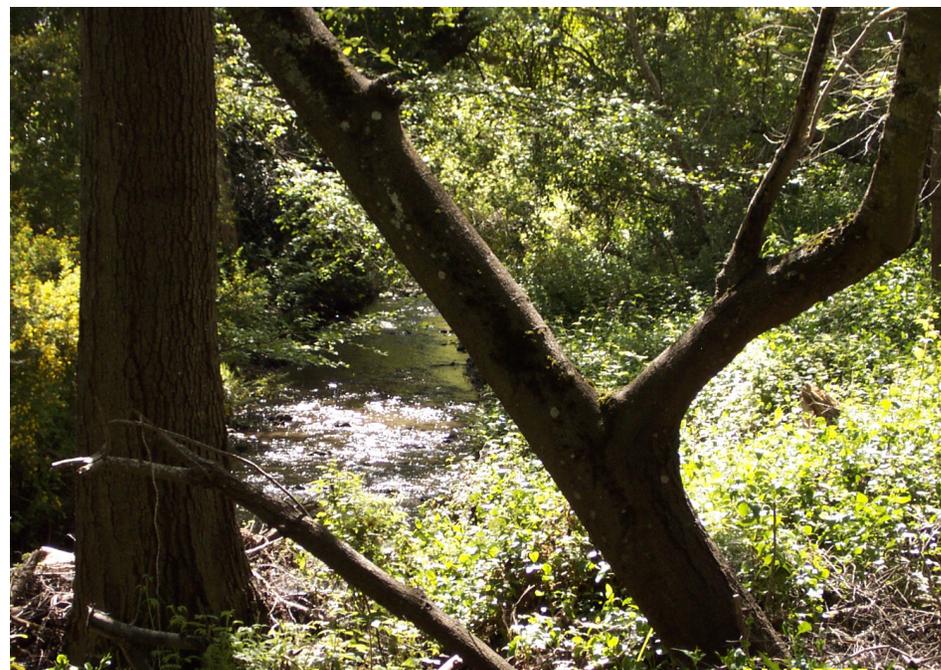




Historic Resources



Natural Resources



Scenic Resources



Alpine Road

