



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

LEGISLATIVE, FUNDING, AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

R-21-117
September 7, 2021

AGENDA ITEM 3

AGENDA ITEM

Bay Area Ridge Trail Designation at El Sereno Open Space Preserve

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS *den*

1. Recommend the Board of Directors designate 2.2 miles of the Aquinas Trail and the 1.3-miles of the Serenity Trail in El Sereno Open Space Preserve as a new segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail.
2. Recommend the Board of Directors designate the 0.2-mile section of the Montevina Ridge Trail from the Aquinas Trail intersection to the roadside parking area on Montevina Road as an "access route" to the Bay Area Ridge Trail.

SUMMARY

In June 2021, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) acquired a property as an addition to El Sereno Open Space Preserve (El Sereno Preserve or Preserve). This addition formalizes a segment of the Aquinas Trail, establishing trail continuity within the Preserve and laying the foundation for trail connectivity throughout the southern Bay Area region. This trail segment is identified as a high priority gap in the Bay Area Ridge Trail (Ridge Trail) and serves as a key piece of a planned regional trail connection between El Sereno Preserve and Sanborn County Park in association with the Highway 17 Regional Trails Crossing Project (Highway 17 Project). As such, the proposed 3.5-mile trail designation in El Sereno Preserve has been a long-standing goal of the District, County of Santa Clara, and Bay Area Ridge Trail Council (Ridge Trail Council). In addition, this designation would support the Ridge Trail Council in fulfilling a milestone achievement: dedicating 400 miles of Ridge Trail. Therefore, the General Manager recommends the Legislative, Funding, and Public Affairs Committee (LFPAC) forward their recommendations to the Board of Directors (Board) to designate a 2.2-mile section of the Aquinas Trail and 1.3-mile section of the Serenity Trail in El Sereno Preserve as a new segment of the Ridge Trail. Additionally, the General Manager recommends that LFPAC forward their recommendations to the Board to designate the 0.2-mile section of the Montevina Ridge Trail from the Aquinas Trail intersection to the roadside parking area on Montevina Road as an "access route" to the new segments of the Ridge Trail.

DISCUSSION

In May 2021, the District was awarded a \$1,075,000 grant from the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) to purchase a 182.15-acre parcel of land previously owned by San Jose Water Company (SJWC) and subsequently acquired by Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST). With the close of

escrow on June 30, 2021, the property was officially added to El Sereno Preserve, closing a central trail gap within the Preserve (R-20-78, R-21-28). The recent actions present a timely opportunity to fulfill multiple objectives for the District, its partners, and peer agencies.

With the addition of the SJWC property and the now-possible dedication of the Aquinas and Serenity Trails in El Sereno Preserve, the District is positioned to support the long-standing regional trail partnership with the Ridge Trail Council as they celebrate a major milestone accomplishment: dedicating 400-miles of Ridge Trail. In addition to facilitating this landmark achievement, this designation fulfills goals in multiple long-range regional plans. The trail segment in El Sereno Preserve provides a key piece of a planned regional trail connection between El Sereno Preserve and Sanborn County Park, identified as Vision Plan priority #19 and Measure AA project #19 for *El Sereno: Connect to Skyline, Sanborn County Park, and Lexington Reservoir*. Moreover, this Ridge Trail connection completes objectives outlined in the *Santa Clara County Countywide Trails Master Plan Update (1995)*, which is part of the *County of Santa Clara General Plan*, as well as the *Sanborn County Park Trails Master Plan (2008)*. By addressing a critical, high-priority gap in the Ridge Trail and fulfilling long-term goals of the Ridge Trail Council, the District, and the County of Santa Clara, this designation enables continued collaborations for promoting regional connectivity throughout the southern Bay Area.

Furthermore, this proposed Ridge Trail designation supports a key long-term goal of the Highway 17 Project: providing regional and national trail connections. Spanning El Sereno, Sierra Azul, and St. Joseph's Hill Open Space Preserves, as well as Lexington and Sanborn County Parks, the planned Highway 17 crossing and full trail build-out will connect approximately 50 miles of existing Ridge Trail on either side of Highway 17, ultimately linking approximately 30,000 acres of protected open space lands. This regional trail network includes an east-to-west route connecting Sierra Azul Preserve to El Sereno Preserve and Sanborn County Park across Highway 17. The Aquinas and Serenity Trails in El Sereno are an integral throughway within this trail route. Accordingly, the proposed 3.5-mile Ridge Trail designation is a foundational step to fulfill one of the Highway 17 Project's objectives of linking a critical trail gap in the southern Bay Area region. Moreover, as this segment of the Ridge Trail overlaps with the Anza Trail network, it may also be eligible for a national historic trail certification with the National Park Service. The Anza Trail certification is being researched by staff and may be pursued as a separate effort at a future date.

FISCAL IMPACT

The General Manager's recommendation has no immediate fiscal impact. Ridge Trail medallions, which will be provided free of charge from the Ridge Trail Council, will be installed by Visitor Services department staff on existing signposts.

BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

Actions related to this trail segment at El Sereno Preserve previously came before the full Board of Directors at the following public meetings:

- **July 22, 2020:** Board approved the proposed purchase of the 182.15-acre SJWC property as an addition to El Sereno Preserve and the assignment of a purchase and sale agreement to POST ([R-20-78](#), [purchase resolution](#), [meeting minutes](#))

- **February 24, 2021:** Board adopted a resolution authorizing the General Manager to negotiate and execute a grant agreement with the WCB to support the acquisition of the 182.15-acre property as an addition to El Sereno Preserve ([R-21-28](#), [meeting minutes](#))
- **May 21, 2021:** WCB awarded grant funds ([grant agreement](#))
- **June 22, 2021:** Escrow closed for the subject transaction, passing the title to and possession of the property to the District (Resolution No. 20-23, [closing memorandum](#))

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided per the Brown Act. Notifications were also sent to the El Sereno Preserve, Regional Trails, and Highway 17 Project Interested Parties lists, as well as neighbors.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

The designation of the Aquinas, Serenity, and Montevina Ridge Trails as segments of the Bay Area Ridge Trail is not a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act.

NEXT STEPS

Pending LFPAC's recommendation for this designation, staff will present this item to the full Board at the October 27 meeting. Pending Board approval, staff will implement the Ridge Trail designation for the proposed segments, including:

- Updating the El Sereno Preserve map and District website;
- Installing Ridge Trail medallions on trail sign posts;
- Notifying members of the public on the El Sereno Preserve, Regional Trails, and Highway 17 Project Interested Parties lists; and
- Including an announcement about the Ridge Trail designation in a future Newsletter.

Concurrently, the Ridge Trail Council will formally designate the 3.5 miles of trail and 0.2-mile "access route". Ridge Trail Council staff will draft a memo stating the trail's designation and multi-use status, as well as the District's commitment to its long-term stewardship.

The Ridge Trail Council's Executive Committee will also formally approve the designation and promote the designation through their media channels as part of the milestone "400 dedicated miles" achievement.

Attachments:

1. Map of Proposed Bay Area Ridge Trail Segments at El Sereno Preserve
2. Map of Southern Bay Area Ridge Trail Routes

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