



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-22-28
Meeting 22-06
February 23, 2022

AGENDA ITEM 3

AGENDA ITEM

Mindego Hill Grazing Lease Amendment Adding 98 Acres of Grazing Land and Extending the Term of the Lease for Five Years

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION *den*

Adopt a Resolution authorizing the General Manager to execute a second amendment to the Mindego Hill grazing lease to add 98 acres of grazing land and exercise the option to extend the lease with Bar DX Livestock for five years.

SUMMARY

The proposed grazing lease amendment would allow the addition of 98 acres of grazing land, referred to as the South Pasture, to be incorporated into the current grazing lease with Bar DX Livestock, owned by Ronnie and Bartley Seever. The amendment would also exercise the option of a five-year extension to the previous five-year grazing lease term.

DISCUSSION

Conservation grazing utilizes livestock as a management tool to manage brush encroachment in open grasslands and preserve their unique biodiversity. This ecological focus distinguishes conservation grazing from basic livestock production. The Mindego Hill Grazing Plan developed for each grazing location sets the management parameters (such as stocking rates, class of livestock, seasonality, and duration of grazing activity) to meet specific conservation goals for the property. The District's Conservation Grazing Program is a mutually beneficial partnership with small-scale local ranchers.

Property Background

The Mindego Ranch property was acquired by the District as an addition to Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve in 2008. After acquisition, a biological survey of the property confirmed the significant presence of the endangered San Francisco garter snake (SFGS) and its native prey, the California red-legged frog (CRLF). Habitat enhancement plans for these two important and protected species guide all future District work within this property.

An amendment to the Use & Management Plan (U&M) for the Mindego Ranch property was approved in 2014 calling for the introduction of conservation grazing as a management tool to enhance and protect sensitive habitat for both SFGS and CRLF. Mindego Ranch is one of only six known populations of the endangered SFGS.

After a competitive Request for Proposal solicitation, a five-year lease with one option for a five-year extension was executed with Bar DX Livestock in 2015 (R-15-114). When the lease was executed, cattle were allowed access to three pastures on the 1,047 acres of Mindego Ranch. The south pasture area was subsequently identified by District staff as a fourth potential pasture and a future priority for conservation grazing expansion in the preserve to further protect and enhance sensitive species habitat and reduce fuel loads.

At the January 22, 2020, Board meeting, two addenda to the Mindego Ranch Grazing Plan were approved. The first addendum provided additional guidance regarding future management in the south pasture expansion area. The second addendum was to approve the Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Russian Ridge Use and Management Plan, in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act, in conjunction with the addition of the south pasture as part of the conservation grazing area on the property. These approvals allowed staff to move forward with preparing the south pasture area for conservation grazing.

Partnerships

The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) is a federal agency under the US Department of Agriculture that provides farmers and ranchers with financial and technical assistance to encourage conservation practices as part of day-to-day agricultural activities. The NRCS manages the following natural resources conservation programs that assist agricultural producers with reducing soil erosion, enhancing water supplies, improving water quality, increasing wildlife habitat, and reducing damage caused by floods and other natural disasters:

- *Agricultural Management Assistance* - Construct or improve water management or irrigation structures.
- *Conservation Stewardship Program* - Improve resource conditions, such as soil quality, water quality, air quality, habitat quality, and energy.
- *Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)* - Implement conservation practices, or activities, such as conservation planning, that address natural resource concerns on agricultural lands.

Ronnie Seever, the tenant at Mindego Ranch and owner of Bar DX Livestock, worked with the local NRCS office to obtain funding assistance through the EQIP program, reducing District costs, to install grazing infrastructure improvements in the south pasture expansion area. The Board provided land-owner approval for the tenant's participation in the EQIP program at the January 22, 2020, Board meeting.

Infrastructure Improvements

The infrastructure required for the 98-acre south pasture expansion consisted of fencing and water system improvements as follows:

Perimeter fencing: Approximately 5,000 linear feet of new wildlife-friendly livestock fencing was installed along the eastern and southern pasture boundary. Short sections of fence were placed along the western boundary of the pasture to reinforce the natural barrier of dense vegetation and steep terrain.

Water: No natural water sources were present within the pasture expansion area to support grazing livestock. However, a clean reliable water source was already developed on Mindego Ranch that uses a spring with a solar powered pump to supply water to a storage

tank and water troughs in pastures adjacent to the expansion area. The existing water system was modified to supply water to the expansion area. Three new wildlife-friendly concrete water troughs were installed to supply water to livestock in the south pasture area. Two of the new troughs were located within the south pasture at sites that are minimally visible from the Mindego Hill Trail to reduce aesthetic impacts. A third trough was installed in the holding field/corral area above the pasture to be accessible to equestrians using the trail. A new 5,000-gallon, low-profile tank was installed in the corral area to supply water to the new troughs.

Expansion Area

The 98 acres of the pasture expansion would be managed according to the guidelines established in the 2019 Grazing Management Plan (GMP) Addendum prepared by Koopman Rangeland Consulting. This addendum was adopted by the Board January 22, 2020. Per the addendum, the expansion area would optimally be seasonally grazed during the winter and early spring and could support 145.2 AUMs (12 cows over the six-month period) in an average rainfall year. Utilizing the principles of the District’s conservation grazing program and following the guidelines established in the GMP addendum, realization of District goals for improving wildlife habitat, preserving native grasslands, and maintaining the local, rural agricultural character are attainable.

Lease Extension

When the lease was approved, it was written for a 5-year term beginning in 2015 with an option for one 5-year extension. The Board report, R-15-114 and the lease both contain this language. However, the accompanying Resolution did not include the authorization for the General Manager to execute the extension. It is now standard practice to include Board authorization for the General Manager to approve a second term in Board resolutions approving a grazing lease. Since expiration of the first five-year term, the tenant has been in month-to-month holdover status pending this Agenda Item for Board approval of the lease area expansion and authorization of the 5-year lease extension.

FISCAL IMPACT

The District lease rate for grazing properties is calculated by multiplying the number of Animal Unit Equivalents (AUE) grazing on the property by the total number of months grazed for the season/year to obtain the total Animal Unit Months (AUM). The AUMs are then multiplied by the current AUM market rate to determine the total lease fee for the year. The Fiscal Year 2021-22 (FY22) AUM rate utilized by the District is \$10.89 per AUM. The estimated additional annual lease revenue from Mindego Ranch for the addition of the 98 - acre expansion area is as follows:

Ranch	AUM	AUM Rate (2022)	Annual Lease Fee*
Mindego Hill 98- acre expansion area	145.2	\$ 10.89	\$1,581

*The FY22 lease fee may need to be prorated depending on when cattle are actually introduced to the new pasture based on site conditions and available water.

BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

- **January 2014:** The Board adopted the CEQA Mitigated Negative Declaration and approved an amendment to the Russian Ridge Use and Management Plan. (R-14-21)
- **August 2015:** The Board approved selection of Bar DX Livestock as grazing tenant on Mindego Hill Ranch. (R-15-114)
- **January 2020:** The Board adopted an addendum to Mindego Hill Ranch Grazing Management Plan to add the expansion area, amend the Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve Use and Management Plan, and amend the Mitigated Negative Declaration for the Mindego Ranch Use and Management Plan ([R-20-10](#), [Meeting minutes](#))
- **May 2021:** The Board awarded a contract to Bar DX Livestock to install grazing infrastructure to expand grazing to the south pasture. ([R-21-62](#), [Meeting minutes](#))

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

The Project was evaluated in a Mitigated Negative Declaration and Initial Study (IS/MND), adopted by the Board on January 22, 2014, available at:

<https://www.openspace.org/sites/default/files/2013.11.25.MindegoRanchISMND.pdf>.

An Addendum to the IS/MND was adopted January 22, 2020 (R-20-10). The Addendum addressed the infrastructure improvements included in this proposed contract and found they did not alter any of the conclusions of the 2014 IS/MND. No significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant effects will result.

NEXT STEPS

If approved, the General Manager will execute the second amendment to the Mindego Ranch grazing lease that will add 98 acres of grazing land and extend the lease terms by five years.

Attachments

1. Resolution Authorizing the General Manager to Amend and Extend the Grazing Lease with Bar DX Livestock (Mindego Ranch, Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve)
2. Map of South Pasture Expansion

Responsible Department Head:

Brandon Stewart, Land & Facilities Services Manager

Prepared by:

Susan Weidemann, Property Management Specialist II, Land & Facilities, Property Management

RESOLUTION 22-__

RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF THE MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT AUTHORIZING THE GENERAL MANAGER TO AMEND AND EXTEND THE GRAZING LEASE WITH BAR DX LIVESTOCK (MINDEGO RANCH, RUSSIAN RIDGE OPEN SPACE PRESERVE)

WHEREAS, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) may, under the provisions of California Public Resources Code section 5540, lease property owned by the District; and

WHEREAS, the lease of Mindego Ranch for grazing and rangeland management purposes is compatible with park and open space purposes, and the lease of such premises is in the public interest; and

WHEREAS, the District wishes to amend the lease with BarDX Livestock to include a pasture expansion area, and extend the lease on the terms as hereinafter set forth.

NOW, THEREFORE, the Board of Directors of Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District does hereby resolve as follows:

1. The General Manager is authorized to grant an extension of the Grazing Lease on the terms and conditions set forth in the Grazing Lease and amend the Lease to include the 98-acre south pasture expansion area. The General Manager and General Counsel are further authorized to approve any technical revisions to the Lease, which are necessary or appropriate to the implementation of the Lease.
2. The General Manager or designee is further authorized to sign and approve all other documents necessary or appropriate to effectuate the purposes of the Grazing Lease.

* * * * *

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Board of Directors of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District on _____, 2022, at a regular meeting thereof, by the following vote:

AYES:
NOES:
ABSTAIN:
ABSENT:

ATTEST:

APPROVED:

Karen Holman, Secretary
Board of Directors

Zoe Kersteen-Tucker, President
Board of Directors

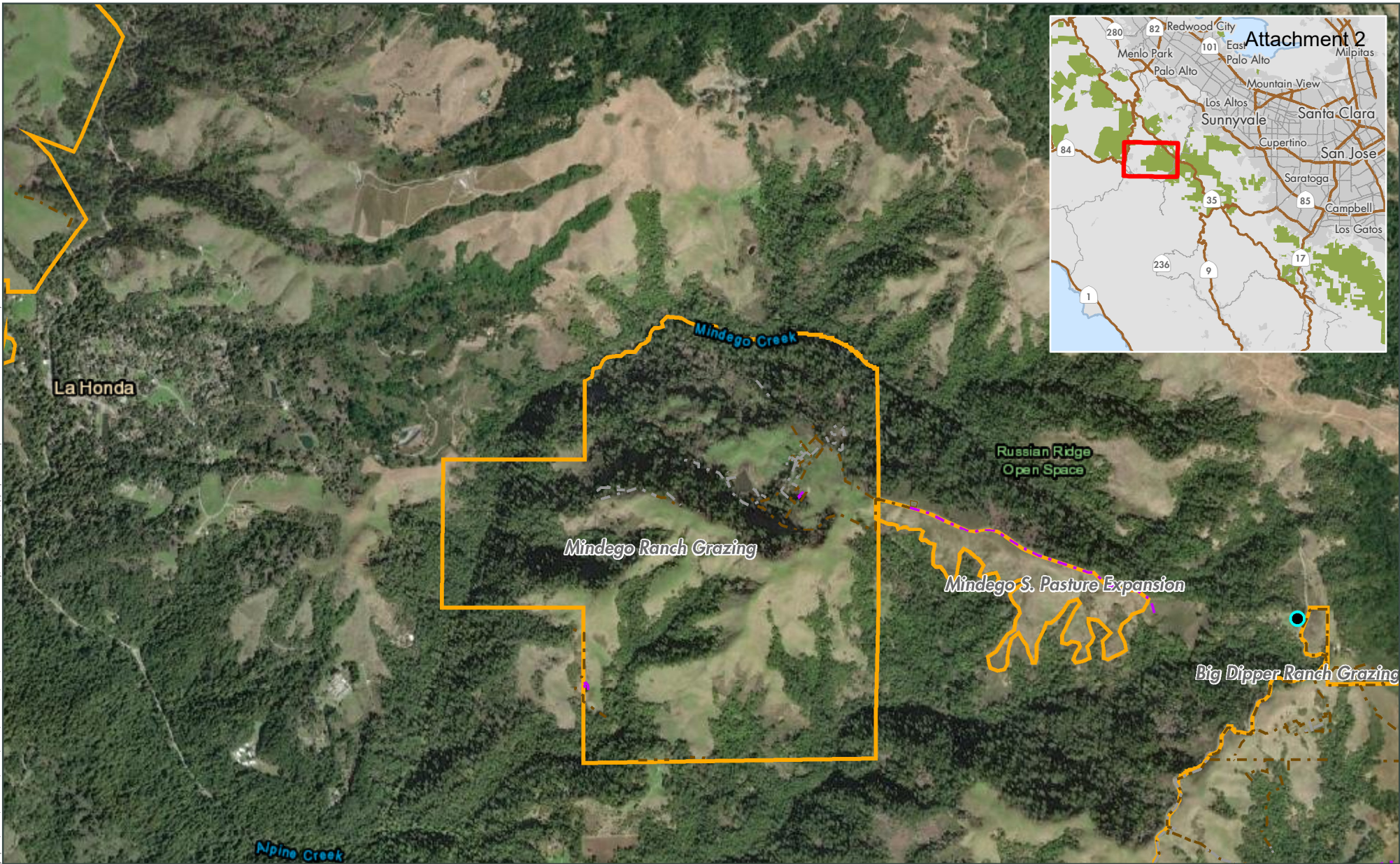
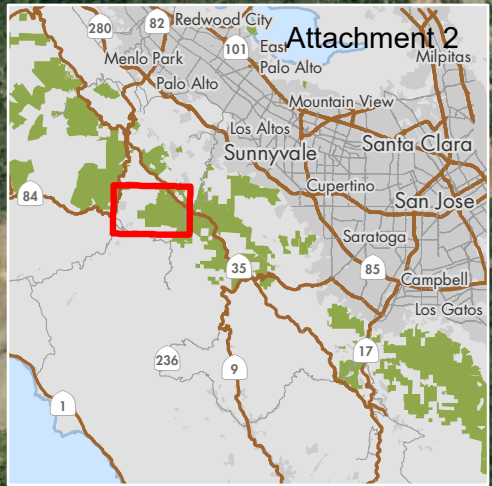
APPROVED AS TO FORM:

Hilary Stevenson, General Counsel

I, the District Clerk of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, hereby certify that the above is a true and correct copy of a resolution duly adopted by the Board of Directors of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District by the above vote at a meeting thereof duly held and called on the above day.

Jennifer Woodworth, District Clerk

Data Source(s): Source: Esri, Maxar, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AeroGRID, IGN, and the GIS User Community, Esri, HERE, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS user community



Mindego Ranch South Pasture Expansion

- | | |
|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Fence | Lease Area |
| --- Fence - Other | Grazing |
| --- Fence - Permanent | |
| --- Fence - Proposed | |
| Corral | |

Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District
(MROSD)
1/3/2022

