




Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

Memorandum

DATE: April 13, 2022

MEMO TO: Board of Directors

THROUGH: Ana Ruiz, General Manager 

FROM: Arianna Nuri, Planner I

SUBJECT: On-Leash Dog Access at Lower La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve

SUMMARY

The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) is preparing to include seasonal, on-leash dog access at the newly constructed Grasshopper Loop Trail in southern La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve (Preserve) as approved by the Board of Directors (Board) in the 2012 La Honda Creek Master Plan (Master Plan). In accordance with the Master Plan, the District consulted with the appropriate resource agencies as well as the onsite grazing tenant, who all concurred with the District's implementation plans for seasonal, on-leash dog access on this trail. The opening to on-leash dog access would occur concurrent with the public opening of the Grasshopper Loop Trail scheduled for summer of 2022.

DISCUSSION

La Honda Creek Master Plan

In 2012, the Board approved the [Master Plan](#), which established a long-term vision for the Preserve to guide use and management decisions over a 30-year span (R-12-83). The Master Plan aims to balance the preservation of viable agriculture, cultural history, and the natural environment with public education and low-intensity recreation. The Master Plan's public access goals include the enhancement of recreational trail opportunities. The Master Plan includes the provision of limited on-leash dog access, pending consultation with and concurrence from resource agencies and the grazing tenant.

The Master Plan identifies two locations for on-leash dog access at the Preserve: the upper northern area of the preserve across 2.9-miles of trail, which was opened to on-leash dog access in 2018, and an approximately 1.1-mile (new) loop trail (known now as the Grasshopper Loop Trail) located in the lower portion of the Preserve (refer to Attachment 1).

Grasshopper Loop Trail On-Leash Dog Access

In 2021, staff completed the construction of the Grasshopper Loop Trail as outlined under the Phase II Trail Improvements of the Master Plan. As a loop trail located near the Sears Ranch Road Parking Area, the trail is optimal for on-leash dog access in alignment with the September

27, 1995 Board-approved Dog Access Site Evaluation Criteria. Accordingly, the Implementation section of the Master Plan directs staff to work with the appropriate resource agencies and the onsite grazing tenant to confirm the appropriateness of on-leash dog access considering the Preserve's ecological conditions and ongoing grazing operation.

Consultation and Research

In alignment with the Master Plan, staff submitted a memo to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service on November 12, 2021 informing the agencies of the District's plan to introduce on-leash dog use at the Grasshopper Loop Trail. The memo described the successful 2018 introduction of on-leash dog access at the upper northern portion of the Preserve, as well as the actions taken to prepare for expanded dog access. These measures include:

- Reviewing feedback previously received from the regulatory agencies on appropriate dog access protocols in open spaces;
- Evaluating the ecological suitability of dog access on the Grasshopper Loop Trail and ensuring adequate distance from the preserve's Conservation Management Units;
- Confirming that the on-leash compliance in the upper northern portion of the Preserve exceeds District standards; and,
- Developing conflict prevention measures to minimize potential issues between dogs and cattle.

Staff requested input from the resource agencies prior to proceeding with the proposed implementation. The resource agencies raised no issues with the District's proposal for dog access on the Grasshopper Loop Trail.

Staff also consulted with Allan Renz, the grazing tenant at the Preserve, in 2018 prior to constructing the Grasshopper Loop Trail and continuously engaged him as staff pursued the dog access plan. Mr. Renz is agreeable to on-leash dog access along the Grasshopper Loop Trail and has shared his experience with on-leash dog use in grazing areas on other public lands to inform the District's implementation plan.

On February 7, 2021, staff presented the plans for the limited on-leash dog access at lower La Honda Creek Preserve to the San Mateo County Farm Bureau. Farm Bureau members asked several questions regarding implementation and compliance with leash laws and the seasonal closure. No objections were raised.

District staff also conducted research to identify best practices and understand how other public land management agencies manage dog access in active grazing areas; this research included consultation with the Rangeland Specialist at East Bay Regional Parks. The District's plan for a more restrictive on-leash and seasonal approach to dog access was informed by the research.

Based on data collected by staff, consultations with peer and regulatory agencies, and Mr. Renz's input, the Grasshopper Loop Trail would be closed to dogs from August to mid-December to minimize potential conflicts between dogs, cows, and people during the sensitive calving season. Compliance would be enforced through informational and regulatory signage and patrol. Public outreach and education would precede the opening as described in greater detail below.

Informational and Regulatory Signage

Similar to the upper northern portion of the Preserve where dog access is permitted, standard District dog signage will be installed specifying that (1) dogs must be on-leash, (2) a dog walker can have no more than 3 dogs, (3) dog walkers must pick up dog waste, and (4) that there is no dog access beyond the loop trail. Additionally, in response to Mr. Renz's feedback, staff have developed augmented versions of the District's standard grazing signs, which alert trail users that they are in an active grazing area and guide them to follow regulations in place for their personal safety and the protection of the grazing operation. These enhanced grazing signs include language informing the public that: (1) trail users must always stay on-trail, (2) cattle perceive dogs to be a threat, and (3) that violations are subject to fines. Staff have also added a permanent "Seasonal Closure" sign to notify the public that dogs are not permitted during the sensitive calving season (August to mid-December).

Ongoing Patrol and Enforcement

District Rangers will actively enforce and educate visitors on regulations requiring dogs to be on-leash, on-trail, and to comply with the seasonal closure. Volunteer Trail Patrol will provide additional public trail engagement and onsite education regarding responsible dog access in grazing areas.

Maintenance and Operation Plans for Dog Waste

Land and Facilities staff will install a dog waste receptacle near the Sears Ranch Road Parking Area. Staff will empty the dog waste receptacle twice a week concurrent with the existing Sears Ranch Road Parking Area restroom cleaning schedule.

Public Outreach and Key Messaging

Utilizing the services of Doug McConnell from NBC *Open Roads* and with assistance from Mr. Renz, staff developed an informational *Open Roads* segment about recreation in grazing areas and the importance of conservation grazing, which will air on NBC and circulate online throughout the spring and summer. In addition, staff will share best practices for recreating in grazing areas and proper dog walker guidance on the District's social media channels, print newsletter, and website. Moreover, staff will send a mailing to neighbors sharing the regulations, seasonal restrictions, and best practices for dog access along the Grasshopper Loop Trail concurrent with the trail opening. Trail opening activities will also include a "Meet the Rancher" event with Mr. Renz to further engage the public on the importance of grazing and responsible recreation in the San Mateo County

Next Steps

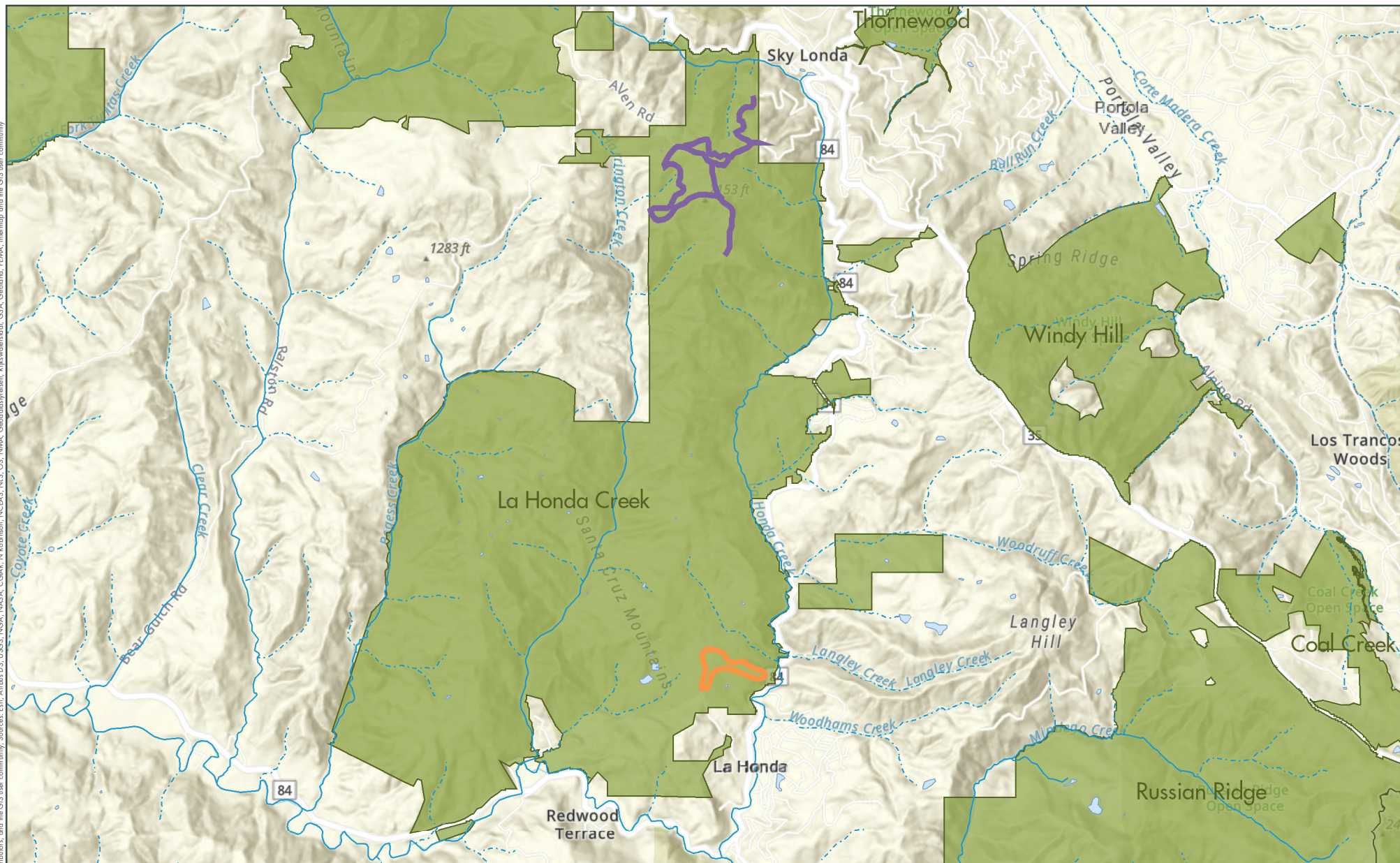
Staff is proceeding with final actions to open the Grasshopper Loop Trail to seasonal, on-leash dog usage concurrent with the summer 2022 public opening, including:

1. Ordering and installing informational and regulatory signage.
2. Installing the dog waste receptacle near the Sears Ranch Road Parking Area.
3. Updating District maps.
4. Notifying adjoining owners, residents of local neighborhoods, and interested parties.

Attachment:

1. Map of Dog Access Areas in La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve

Data Source(s): Esri, HERE, Garmin, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS user community. Sources: Esri, Airbus DS, USGS, NASA, NOAA, NCEAS, NLS, OS, NMA, GeoDataStylen, Rijkswaterstaat, GSA, Geoland, FEMA, Intermap and the GIS user community.



La Honda Creek Preserve Dog Access

- On-Leash Dog Access Trails, Upper La Honda (*Effective fall 2018*)
- Seasonal, On-Leash Dog Access Trail, Lower La Honda (*Effective summer 2022*)
- Preserve Boundary

Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District
(MROSD)
10/4/2021

