



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

Memorandum

DATE: May 28, 2025

MEMO TO: Board of Directors

THROUGH: Ana Ruiz, General Manager 

FROM: Kirk Lenington, Natural Resources Manager

SUBJECT: Science and Stewardship Symposium Update

Summary

Last year, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's (District) Board of Directors (Board) identified a science symposium as a project on the three-year Capital Improvement and Action Plan and staff soon after began planning for a one-day conference. The Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network (SCMSN, Network), a collaborative of 25 organizations engaged in land stewardship in the Santa Cruz Mountains of California, has been actively working to help member organizations collaborate and coordinate on important conservation and natural resource projects and programs at a regional scale. Given their regional reach and area of focus, staff approached the Network with a proposal to organize and host the symposium given the mutual goals of featuring shared regional leadership in land management and stewardship research among all the organizations participating in the Network.

The idea for this symposium arises from the need to practice science-based stewardship and connect academic and government researchers to the existing and emerging land management challenges facing our region. The symposium will focus on land stewardship in the Santa Cruz Mountains and feature presentations and talks from researchers and land stewardship practitioners. The Science & Stewardship Symposium has been scheduled to take place in early 2026 (late January or February) and will feature projects completed on private or public lands, as well as emerging research informing land management priorities of the Santa Cruz Mountains Bioregion.

Discussion

Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network

The Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network is a collaborative of 25 organizations that own or steward land in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The purpose of SCMSN is to enable its members to work together on important land stewardship issues in the region, and by doing so, to work at a landscape scale. The member organizations include public agencies, land trusts, indigenous tribes, universities, water companies, and timber companies. SCMSN plays an important role as

a regional entity that can create the connective tissue for regional collaborative projects to succeed.

Science and Stewardship Symposium – Early Planning

A Science Symposium was first proposed in the District's Fiscal Year 2022-23 (FY23) work program to highlight local scientific research with applications to land management priorities and to increase the awareness of the District's stewardship work with our state elected delegation. This project was later deferred, due to shifting work priorities and staff capacity limitations. The project was again identified as a priority in the FY25 work program, with preliminary planning activities beginning in the latter half of 2024. The scope of the envisioned symposium has expanded to include a focus on scientific research and stewardship management projects that feature science-based practices. This expanded scope has broadened the interest and expected participation in the conference and allowed this project to proceed with the added project management support from the SCMSN Project Team.

The Network's collaborative focus is a natural fit for the regional focus of the Science and Stewardship Symposium. A Symposium Project Team consisting of representatives from the San Mateo Resource Conservation District, California State Parks, Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority, Peninsula Open Space Trust, Stanford's Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve ('Ootchamin 'Ooyakma), and the Bureau of Land Management has been formed to plan and implement the conference. As the Symposium coordinator, the Network has retained an event planning firm to manage the logistics for the one-day conference, including the event space reservation. The District will be the primary event sponsor, expecting to contribute \$173,000 for this effort. Other SCMSN member organizations have also pledged funding towards the conference expenses.

The Science and Stewardship Symposium is being planned as a one-day conference with a target attendance of 150-200 people, comprised primarily of academic researchers and land management practitioners. The locally elected legislative delegation will also be invited to gain additional awareness of the land management issues affecting our region. The current conference itinerary is envisioned as follows:

- The symposium will begin with a Plenary Session featuring a keynote speaker with statewide (and national) prominence in research and stewardship. The plenary session will continue through the morning with a series of presentations on priority issues facing regional land managers.
- Three Concurrent Sessions will be held in the afternoon with two to three hours of presentations.
- Following the afternoon concurrent sessions, the symposium will conclude with a closing plenary or panel session to be followed by a hosted Poster Session and reception.
- Topics and focus areas for presentations are currently being finalized by the SCMSN Project Team. Topics to be highlighted include wildland fire fuels management for healthy forests and the protection of infrastructure, ecosystem restoration in the face of climate driven change, and endangered species management and recovery.
- Within each of these topical areas, a mix of presenters will be solicited to represent the mosaic of land ownership and management within the Santa Cruz Mountains and will include public and non-profit agencies, private and working lands, native American

traditional ecological knowledge, and scientific research. The focus of the sessions is subject to change based on interest and presenters.

Next Steps

The SCMSN Project Team is currently drafting the Science & Stewardship Symposium announcement and Request for Presentations to be released this summer. The release of the announcement will also be accompanied by direct solicitation of presenters through the Network's extensive membership. An event planning consultant has been retained to assist with all of the logistics for the symposium, including locating and reserving the venue for the symposium, audio/visual systems, event registration and ticket sales, day-of event logistics and management, coordinating food & beverage services, and post-event wrap-up. Event materials and updates will be forwarded to the Board as they are prepared and distributed by SCMSN.

Attachment:

1. SCMSN Partner Organizations/Fact Sheet



Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network

Member Organizations (April 2025)

Amah Mutsun Land Trust	San Jose Water
Big Creek Lumber	San Lorenzo Valley Water District
Bureau of Land Management	San Mateo County Parks
California State Parks	San Mateo Resource Conservation District
CalFire	Santa Clara County Parks
Girl Scouts of Northern California	Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority
Jasper Ridge Biological Preserve	Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency
Land Trust of Santa Cruz County	Santa Cruz County Parks
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District	Save the Redwoods League
Peninsula Open Space Trust	Sempervirens Fund
Redwood Empire	Swanton Pacific Ranch
Resource Conservation District of Santa Cruz County	UC Santa Cruz Natural Reserves
	Valley Water