



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

**SPECIAL MEETING
USE AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

November 10, 2011

DRAFT MINUTES

I. ROLL CALL

Director Kishimoto called the Special Meeting to order at 1:03 p.m.

Members Present: Jed Cyr, Yoriko Kishimoto, and Cecily Harris

Members Absent: None

Staff Present: General Manager Steve Abbors, Planning Manager Ana Ruiz, Open Space Planner II Lisa Bankosh, Open Space Planner I Gretchen Laustsen, Project Manager Gina Coony, Senior Planner Meredith Manning, Senior Resource Planner Kirk Lenington, Skyline Area Superintendent Brian Malone, Foothill Area Superintendent Michael Newburn, Operations Manager David Sanguinetti, Support Services Supervisor David Topley, Administrative Services Manager Kate Drayson, Public Affairs Manager Rudy Jurgensen, Planning Administrative Assistant Jeannie Buscaglia, and District Clerk Michelle Radcliffe

II. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

Upon motion by Director Cyr, seconded by Director Harris, and unanimously passed, the Committee approved adoption of the agenda. (Vote: 3-0-0)

III. COMMITTEE BUSINESS

- 1. Agenda Item 1** – Receive Staff Presentation and Consider Approval of New Trail Use Recommendations as Described in the Attached Memo for the Mindego Gateway Project at Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve

Open Space Planner II Lisa Bankosh provided background information on the Mindego Gateway Project and explained that staff is undergoing the California Environmental Quality Act process for this project and is conducting a number of enabling studies (habitat assessments, sensitive species and cultural). Next, Ms. Bankosh briefly explained that the San Francisco garter snake is an endangered species found only on the San Francisco peninsula and that it is considered a fully protected species. She further noted that because of its fully protected status, the state

of California cannot issue permits allowing any “take” of the species. Because the species is found on the Mindego property, the District hired Biosearch Associates to evaluate species and public use parameters and make recommendations regarding the appropriate usage for the Mindego Area.

Next, Open Space Planner I Gretchen Laustsen gave a brief overview of the District’s purchase of Mindego Ranch from Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) and stated that one of the conditions in the purchase agreement was that the District agreed to provide limited public access to the top of Mindego Hill. She further reported that in 2011, the District purchased the Silva Property and agreed to work with POST to provide a staging area and a connector trail from the staging area to the existing Russian Ridge trail network.

Ms. Laustsen then summarized the proposed trail connector to the Ancient Oaks trail as well as the proposed Mindego Hill trail alignment. She noted that the Use and Management Committee approved the Mindego Hill trail alignment in June 2010. At that meeting, the Use and Management Committee agreed that due to the known presence of the San Francisco Garter Snake at the site, the District would have potential species impacts from multi-use evaluated by experts.

Next, Jeff Alvarez of Biosearch Associates provided a brief summary of his experience and background. He explained that he is working with the District to develop a management plan for the Mindego area because of the sensitive snake population and that snake observations have been made around the lake and on the existing access road. He further reported that there have been observations of new hatchlings called “young of the year” in the area and explained that “young of the year” is a criteria for success in the breeding of SF garter snakes. He stated that in order to protect the species’ habitat and to avoid any “take” of the species, Biosearch Associates is recommending that the site have very limited use, including hiking and equestrian use only on the Mindego Hill Trail and a portion of the Mindego Ridge Trail (access road).

Director Kishimoto asked that the differences in impacts between hikers, equestrians, and mountain bikers be explained. Mr. Alvarez explained that horses are innately nervous around snakes and are generally aware if there is a snake nearby. He then explained that there is a greater risk of take with a mountain bikes because some bikers may not comply with posted speed limits. He stated that the likelihood of take on the snake is higher with bike use than for equestrian or hiking use. Further discussion ensued.

Public Comment: The following people spoke against staff’s recommendation of limiting the use of the proposed Mindego Hill trail to hikers and equestrians: Struther Smith, Josh Moore, Lyndall Erb, Jim Sullivan, and JC Dill.

Brief discussion was held regarding bicycle storage at the Mindego Hill site.

Ms. Bankosh then responded to some comments made by the public regarding evidence of snake mortality from mountain bike use. She explained that there have not been any scientific studies conducted on mountain bikes and the snake due to its

status as a fully protected species, but that there are documented instances of bikes killing snakes, including a documented incident at Crystal Springs Reservoir mentioned in the San Francisco garter snake recovery plan and a YouTube clip of a mountain biker killing a garter snake recorded by the cyclist.

Public Comment: Strether Smith provided rebuttal to Ms. Bankosh's comment.

Director Harris asked if staff had considered conducting a study on the interactions of trail users and the San Francisco garter snake. Ms. Bankosh responded that a study like that would be appropriate for another species but that since the San Francisco garter snake is a fully protected species, the District would not be able to acquire any permits to conduct a study that could result in harm to the species.

General Manager Steve Abbors briefly commented on the District's land-management decisions and stated that for this particular instance, the District is making its land management decision based on recommendations provided by scientific experts and that the District needs to be in full compliance of laws regarding fully protected, endangered species. Mr. Abbors also addressed the public's concerns about the District's attempt to prohibit future mountain bike access on District preserves and stated that staff is currently working on many projects to provide multi-use access throughout District land and that the intent of today's meeting is to address one particular issue at Mindego Hill. Further discussion from the Committee ensued.

Motion: Upon motion by Director Cyr, seconded by Director Harris, and unanimously passed, the Committee adopted staff's recommendations of designating the proposed Ancient Oaks Connector Trail as a multi-use trail. (Vote: 3-0-0)

Director Harris expressed her concerns on limiting the use of the trails to only hikers and equestrians and stated that the trails should continue to be multi-use and open to all users. She questioned if the District should open up a trail at Mindego Hill given the sensitive habitat that exists. Ms. Bankosh responded that public access to the Mindego Hill is a condition in the purchase agreement with POST but also that the District is trying to balance its mission of providing public access and protecting resources. She explained that opening the trail but having limited use is a compromise to establish that balance.

Motion: Upon motion by Director Cyr, seconded by Director Kishimoto, the Committee adopted staff's recommendation to designate the proposed Mindego Hill Trail as hiking and equestrian-only trails; install a gate along Mindego Ridge Trail; permit horse watering in designated troughs; construct the trail with as little grading or other as surface disturbance as possible; and limit vehicle access to daily patrols and authorized persons that follow a five mile per hour speed limit. (Vote: 2-1-0: Noes: Harris)

2. **Agenda Item 2** – Receive Staff Presentation and Consider Approval of New Trail Designation to Formally add the Black Mountain Trail Extension Easement as a Hiking and Equestrian Trail, with the Recommended Site Improvements, as a part of the Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve Trail Network, and Name it the “Quarry Trail”

Senior Planner Meredith Manning provided brief historical background on the Black Mountain Trail Extension Easement and stated that as part of the land exchange agreement with Permanente Quarry, Hanson Permanente Cement (Hanson), a 20-foot easement was given to the District along with an informal, but well used trail along a ridge the Black Mountain Trail. She stated that trail is roughly 1.1 miles and is valuable to the District because it provides a connection between two popular preserve trails as well as a link to Monte Bello Ridge and public lands along Page Mill Road and Skyline Boulevard. Lastly, Ms. Manning reported that the link is identified in the 1998 Regional Open Space Study as a future planned trail connection and that the Preliminary Use and Management Plan called for the easement to remain open and designated for hiking and equestrian use.

Next, Ms. Manning explained the constraints the District will endure during construction of this trails which includes a very steep terrain and no drainage structures. She also explained that the easement only provides a 20-foot-wide corridor to conduct any work needed on the trail. Ms. Manning stated that staff is able to improve surface conditions and drainage patterns on the trail but will not at the level of District’s trail standards. Lastly, she reported that staff recommends that the trail be named the “Quarry Trail” based on its location near the Permanente Quarry. Brief discussion ensued.

Motion: Upon motion by Director Harris, seconded by Director Cyr, and unanimously passed, the Committee approved formally adding the Black Mountain Trail Extension Easement as a hiking and equestrian trail with the recommended site improvements as a part of the Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve Trail Network and name the trail the “Quarry Trail”. (Vote: 3-0-0)

IV. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Kishimoto adjourned the Special Meeting of the Use and Management Committee of Midpeninsula Regional Open District at 2:35 p.m.

Michelle Radcliffe, CMC
District Clerk