



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-26-162
Meeting 26-26
October 28, 2026

AGENDA ITEM 7

AGENDA ITEM

Consideration of the Proposed Twin Creeks Mitigation Project at Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Confirm that the proposed Santa Clara County Roads and Airports Department mitigation project aligns with the Mitigation Policy.
2. Following confirmation, authorize the General Manager to negotiate a Mitigation Agreement with Santa Clara County Roads and Airports Department for future consideration and approval.

SUMMARY

The proposed Twin Creeks Mitigation Project (Project) would allow the County of Santa Clara Roads and Airports Department (County) to implement compensatory mitigation on Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) land in the Twin Creeks property within Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve. The proposed Project would mitigate unavoidable permanent aquatic and riparian habitat impacts from the County's Herbert Creek Bridges Replacement Project by restoring approximately 0.30 acre of native woody riparian habitat and enhancing approximately 2,458 linear feet of Herbert and Barrett Creeks through the removal of 44 obsolete bridge abutments, retaining walls, and other debris associated with former development. The Board of Directors (Board) is considering authorizing the General Manager to develop a mitigation agreement with the County that would be brought back for future Board consideration and approval.

BACKGROUND

External agencies regularly approach the District seeking to provide funding and/or requesting the ability to implement mitigation work on District lands to compensate for impacts caused by their offsite projects. In 2022, the Board adopted a Mitigation Policy Chapter as part of the District's comprehensive [Resource Management Policies](#) that directs staff to evaluate and recommend third-party compensatory mitigation when it fulfills District goals and meets District criteria. External mitigation valued above the General Manager's purchasing authority requires Board approval.

External Project Creating the Mitigation Need

The County, in coordination with the California Department of Transportation (CalTrans), is planning to implement the Herbert Creek Bridges Replacement Project to replace three existing

bridges along Alamitos Road that cross Herbert Creek in unincorporated Santa Clara County. The bridges were constructed in 1956 and do not meet current National Bridge Inspection Standards. Replacement is needed to meet current seismic, flood safety, and highway design standards. The project plans to remove the existing bridges and replace them with longer and wider structures, including new abutments, retaining walls, wingwalls, and associated roadway improvements. It so happens that the County's bridge replacement project will itself provide direct benefits to District operations and natural resources given their location for accessing District lands. Alamitos Road terminates within Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve and provides important Preserve access for District patrol, emergency response, and wildfire response. Replacing the existing bridges with longer spans would improve the reliability and safety of this access while also reducing infrastructure within Herbert Creek and its riparian corridor by removing existing bridge supports from the creekbanks and adjacent riparian areas.

Herbert Creek is a perennial stream that originates in Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve and flows northeast to Almaden Reservoir. Construction of the replacement bridges would result in unavoidable temporary and permanent impacts to aquatic and riparian habitat regulated by the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Temporary impacts would result from activities such as construction access, bridge demolition, creek diversion, soil fill for the new bridge support structures, and construction activities. Permanent impacts would result from the new bridge abutments, rock slope protection, retaining walls, increased hardscape along the creekbank, canopy removal, and additional shading of aquatic and riparian habitat associated with the new bridge structures.

The project is expected to result in approximately 0.44 acres of permanent impacts and 0.28 acres of temporary impacts to aquatic and riparian habitat. Because suitable opportunities to compensate for the permanent riparian impacts are limited at the bridge sites due to steep terrain, bedrock, and dense existing canopy, the County identified the need for off-site compensatory mitigation.

DISCUSSION

Proposed Twin Creeks Mitigation Project

The proposed Twin Creeks Mitigation Project (Project) would restore and enhance riparian and aquatic habitat on the District's Twin Creeks property within Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve, approximately 1,000 feet downstream of the Herbert Creek bridge replacement sites. The 154-acre property includes Herbert and Barrett Creeks ("Twin Creeks") and nearly one mile of riparian woodland. Before District acquisition in 2018, the property had been developed with numerous creekside cabins, bridges, retaining structures, and other improvements, which had deteriorated to the point that they were no longer deemed habitable by the County. Prior to District purchase, the previous owner removed the dilapidated buildings and bridge spans. However, concrete bridge abutments, retaining walls, and other debris remain within portions of both creek channels.

The proposed mitigation would combine riparian woodland restoration with removal of obsolete in-stream infrastructure. Approximately 0.30 acre would be restored in two areas along Herbert and Barrett Creeks that remain highly compacted and disturbed, where natural recovery to riparian woodland habitat is constrained. The Herbert Creek restoration area is approximately 0.20 acre and the Barrett Creek restoration area is approximately 0.10 acre. Restoration would

include soil decompaction and, if needed, soil amendments, followed by planting locally native trees and shrubs. No substantial grading is proposed because the existing topography is suitable for establishment of riparian woodland.

The project would also enhance approximately 2,458 linear feet of Herbert and Barrett Creeks by removing 44 remnant structures and debris features that no longer serve a necessary bank-stabilization or infrastructure function. These include former bridge abutments, makeshift retaining walls, and other concrete associated with the former creekside development. Features excluded from the proposed mitigation work are those that (1) could not be removed without destabilizing creek banks or roads, (2) require tree removal, or (3) otherwise would adversely affect sensitive habitat.

Following debris removal, localized bank recontouring, erosion-control measures, and revegetation would be implemented where needed to maintain channel and bank stability. The County would deliver the project on a turn-key basis and fund design, CEQA, permitting, construction, monitoring, maintenance, adaptive management, and District oversight. Final design, boundaries, performance standards, and mitigation credit would be established through regulatory review, CEQA, and permitting.

Evaluation of the Mitigation Policy Alignment and Feasibility Analysis

The District's Mitigation Policy directs staff to evaluate and recommend third-party compensatory mitigation when it fulfills District goals and meets District criteria. The Mitigation Policy (Section 2.3) outlines the following areas for analysis. The findings of the analysis are included below:

Alignment with District Mission, Policies, and Goals

The Herbert Creek Bridges Replacement Project aligns with District goals by addressing necessary public infrastructure while providing compensatory mitigation for unavoidable impacts to aquatic and riparian habitat. The proposed Project directly supports the District's mission to protect and restore the natural environment by repairing native riparian habitat and improving aquatic habitat within Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve.

The mitigation would restore portions of the Twin Creeks property affected by former development and remove obsolete bridge abutments, retaining walls, and other debris from the creek channels. These actions would improve riparian continuity, stream habitat, and ecological function while furthering the District's policy to protect and restore the diversity and integrity of natural resources.

Proximity to District Lands and Regional Context

The proposed mitigation site is located on District land within the Twin Creeks property of Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve, approximately 1,000 feet downstream of the Herbert Creek bridge replacement sites. Herbert Creek and Barrett Creek are perennial streams that converge within the property and flow downstream to Almaden Reservoir. The Twin Creeks property also serves as an important wildlife corridor connecting surrounding open space lands. Because mitigation would occur immediately downstream of the bridge replacement project and within the same creek system, it would address impacts within the same local watershed and ecological setting.

Public, Partner, and Social Implications

The Twin Creeks property is adjacent to Alamitos Road and Canyon Road, the latter of which provides access to neighboring private properties. Project design and implementation would therefore need to maintain roadway stability and minimize effects on neighboring landowners. The proposed mitigation has been designed with these constraints in mind by retaining certain structures to avoid destabilizing roads or creek banks and using existing disturbed areas and roadways for construction access and staging.

Low-impact Project Design and Appropriate Mitigation

The Herbert Creek Bridges Replacement Project has been designed to limit impacts to aquatic and riparian habitat where feasible. Temporary impacts associated with bridge construction would be restored on site following construction, while compensatory mitigation at Twin Creeks would address unavoidable permanent impacts to regulated aquatic and riparian habitat. The permanent impacts include new bridge abutments, rock slope protection, retaining walls, additional hardscape, canopy removal, and increased shading associated with the replacement structures. The proposed bridge replacements would reduce the overall permanent impacts because the new bridges would have a smaller environmental footprint than the existing bridges, which would be removed as part of the project.

The proposed Twin Creeks Mitigation Project is appropriately matched to these impacts because it would restore riparian woodland and enhance aquatic habitat within the same creek system and immediately downstream of the bridge replacement sites. The project would focus restoration on previously developed areas where natural recovery to riparian woodland habitat is unlikely within a practical management timeframe, and would remove obsolete bridge abutments, retaining walls, and other debris from Herbert and Barrett Creeks. Features whose removal could destabilize creek banks or roads, require tree removal, or otherwise adversely affect sensitive habitat would remain in place. This approach concentrates mitigation in previously disturbed areas while avoiding unnecessary disturbance to intact riparian habitat and adjacent infrastructure.

Ecological Impact versus Value

The proposed Project would provide long-term ecological benefits by restoring riparian woodland habitat, improving habitat continuity, and removing obsolete infrastructure that interferes with natural stream processes. Although implementation would cause temporary, localized disturbance, the project incorporates measures to protect creek banks, adjacent roads, and intact riparian habitat. Overall, the anticipated long-term ecological benefits outweigh the temporary disturbance associated with implementation.

Based on this evaluation, staff finds that the proposed Project is consistent with the District's Mitigation Policy and would provide long-term natural resource benefits. Staff therefore recommend authorizing the General Manager to negotiate a Mitigation Agreement with the County for future Board consideration and approval.

FISCAL IMPACT

Developing and negotiating the mitigation agreement will require staff time. The full fiscal and operational impacts associated with the review, approval, oversight, and long-term monitoring of a typical third-party mitigation project would be presented to the Board for review when the final agreement is brought forward for approval.

PRIOR BOARD AND COMMITTEE REVIEW

In March 2022, the Board adopted a Mitigation Chapter as part of the District's [Resource Management Policies](#) that directs staff to evaluate and recommend third-party compensatory mitigation when it fulfills District goals and meets District criteria ([R-22-41](#), [Minutes](#)).

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act. In addition, staff sent notifications to the following interested parties list: Sierra Azul and Natural Resource Management. Postcard notices were sent to potentially impacted inholding properties along Alamitos Road.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

This item is not a project subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The proposed action is limited to authorizing development of a mitigation agreement and does not approve final project design, construction, or implementation. Any future mitigation project would undergo appropriate CEQA review before implementation, with the County anticipated to serve as lead agency and the District serving as a responsible agency, as appropriate.

NEXT STEPS

If approved, staff will work with the County to negotiate and draft a mitigation agreement. The General Manager will return to the Board to seek approval of the mitigation agreement. Staff will update the Board on this project through the annual Comprehensive Vegetation Management Report.

Attachments

1. Bridge Replacement and Mitigation Site Location
2. Representative Photos

Responsible Department Head:
Kirk Lenington, Natural Resources

Prepared by:
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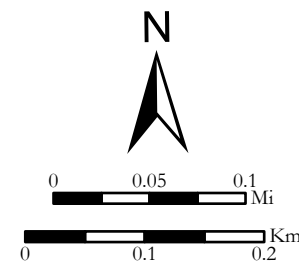


Twin Creeks Mitigation

Sources: Esri, Vantor, Airbus DS, USGS, NGA, NASA, CGIAR, N Robinson, NCEAS, NLS, OS, NMA, Geodatastyrelsen, Rijkswaterstaat, GSA, Geoland, FEMA, Intermap, and the GIS user community, Esri, NASA, NGA, USGS, Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

2026

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 10N



Photographs of Existing Infrastructure Proposed for Removal

Existing site conditions. Photographs are representative of the structures and materials identified for removal.



H5: Remnant concrete structure and associated materials.



H6: Abandoned corrugated metal pipe.



B2: Metal drums and concrete debris.



B3: Remnant concrete abutment beside the creek.

Existing Infrastructure Proposed for Removal



B3: Remnant concrete staircase.



H19: Deteriorated shotcrete and concrete debris.



B12: Abandoned corrugated pipes in creek corridor.



B20: Remnant concrete structure beside the creek.

Existing Infrastructure Proposed for Removal



B7: Abandoned bathtub, retaining wall, and metal container.



B7: Abandoned concrete-filled metal containers.



B7: Concrete retaining wall within creek channel.



B7: Remnant concrete wall and materials upstream.

Existing Bridge Proposed for Replacement



Example of existing vehicle bridges with timber guardrails and gravel road surface.