



# VIEWS

QUARTERLY NEWS FROM THE MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT · WINTER 2023-24



A winter scene from Alpine Pond in Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve. Western pond turtles here face competition from invasive non-native turtles. Always take unwanted pet turtles to a rescue organization rather than releasing them to help protect California's remaining western pond turtles. (Sabrina Lawrence)

## Pond Life

### Helping California's Only Native Freshwater Turtle

**A**mong all of California's incredible biodiversity, there is just one native freshwater turtle: the western pond turtle. For millennia, these long-lived reptiles have inhabited West Coast streams, ponds, lakes and wetlands. Their population is dwindling as a result of habitat loss, impacts from invasive species, a shell fungal pathogen and other threats, prompting a new recommendation from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that their status be elevated to a federally threatened species.

These turtles, though becoming rare, are abundant in the aptly named Turtle Ponds in Midpen's La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve. This fact drove our recent work to engineer and rebuild the berm and spillway on the larger of this pair of human-made ponds, ensuring they remain viable habitat for western pond turtles and a host of other native wildlife.

"These ponds are gems in the western pond turtle world because of the high numbers of healthy turtles at one site. That puts Midpen in a rare and valuable position to safeguard this population,"

said Maria Wojakowski, who received her doctorate from Stanford University and studied western pond turtles on Midpen lands as part of her dissertation. "There is still so much we can learn from the western pond turtles in La Honda Creek Preserve that can help the whole species."

Western pond turtles bask at the surface of the Turtle Ponds, often with just their triangular noses above the water. The grassy south-facing slope near the larger pond's outlet is dotted with shallow holes and broken turtle eggshells, evidence that the turtles successfully breed here.

In the late spring and early summer, females leave the water in search of suitable sites to dig a nest, lay their eggs and cover them with soil and vegetation to incubate underground.

"These ponds are surrounded by excellent habitat that resident turtles, frogs and snakes all need to complete their lifecycles, and conservation grazing assists with that," Midpen Resource Management Specialist Matt Sharp Chaney said.



Western pond turtles use human-made ranching ponds that are now part of Midpen preserves. Today, most freshwater habitats in California have been modified by people. (Ken Hickman)

The ponds were created decades ago by local ranchers needing water for their cattle, and cattle are still on the land now as part of Midpen's Conservation Grazing Program, which continues the long tradition of Coastside ranching in alignment with our coastal mission while also helping Midpen achieve conservation goals. Cattle grazing around the ponds help maintain the open grasslands, free of encroaching shrubs and forest, that western pond turtles need to lay their eggs. Midpen volunteers help too, by removing nonnative invasive thistles and teasel.

**Newly reengineered and reinforced, the Turtle Ponds will continue providing a long-term home and refuge to the largest population of western pond turtles on the Peninsula.**

Turtles aren't the only wildlife benefitting. On a recent morning other wildlife could be observed at the ponds, including rare California red-legged frogs hiding among the bull rushes, dragonflies skimming the surface, migratory ducks and geese stopping over to rest, American kestrels swooping low for prey and rowdy flocks of American coots, just to name a few.

"Even the fish downstream benefit from this project because it is reducing the potential for erosion in the watershed," Sharp Chaney said. "The ripple effects of improving the last remaining freshwater habitats for rare wildlife can be far-reaching."

**Learn more about Midpen's pond restoration efforts at La Honda Creek and other preserves at [openspace.org/ponds](https://openspace.org/ponds).**

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE



### Find Your New Favorite Trail

First-of-its-kind app developed by our expert map-making staff helps you find Midpen trails best suited to you.



Frances Fréyberg

### From Tree Farm to Healthy Forest

New Midpen restoration project is returning a former Christmas tree farm to its roots as a native oak woodland.



Doug Sheaffer

### Free Docent Guided Activities

Midpen docent naturalists share their passion for open space with diverse activities throughout the winter.

## Balancing Midpen's Coastal Mission

Updated Agricultural Policy is a Guide



Ana María Ruiz

Our lives literally depend on a safe and sustainable food supply. Unfortunately, local farmers and ranchers face increasing challenges in producing our local food sources: urban growth, high land values, climate change and extreme weather, dwindling water supplies and economic pressures. Sustainable agriculture not only provides an essential function for people, this land use also plays a critical role in protecting our surrounding natural environment and maintaining lands in open space by supporting rainwater percolation into our groundwater and creek systems, sequestering carbon within soils and crops, maintaining wildlife corridors and protecting the biodiversity of grasslands in grazing areas.

Last month, after nearly five years of policy development and community outreach work, the Midpen board of directors adopted a new,

comprehensive Agricultural Policy to govern agricultural land use and management across all of Midpen's preserves, carefully balancing the values of natural resource protection and agriculture sustainability.

**At Midpen, agricultural uses are integrated within our open space lands, particularly on the San Mateo County coast, allowing us to protect the open spaces and rural character of the Coastside while helping to sustain local food sources for our region.**

In 2004, Midpen's geographical boundaries expanded to include the Coastside Protection Area, which stretches west from Skyline Boulevard to the coastline, and from the San Mateo County line north to Montara. Since then, Midpen has preserved almost 19,000 acres in the coastal area, the majority of which remain in active agriculture, primarily as conservation grazing lands with a few properties containing row crops. Midpen currently leases over 10,000 acres of rangelands as part of our conservation grazing program, to maintain

and enhance the ecological function of coastal grasslands and the species that use them.

At a high level, our new Agricultural Policy has three main goals: to preserve agricultural operations while ensuring the protection of sensitive natural resources, to encourage environmentally sensitive and sustainable agriculture and to enhance diversity, equity and inclusion goals related to the management and operation of Midpen's agricultural lands.

Midpen's Agricultural Policy builds on the commitments we have made in the Coastal Service Plan and proposes new agricultural partnership possibilities for Midpen for supporting the preservation of more intensive agricultural lands, new farm labor housing and new agricultural infrastructure that also support Midpen's larger goals around open space preservation, natural resource protection and ecologically sensitive public access.

Intended as a living document, the policy will be periodically reviewed to ensure we continue meeting the spirit of Midpen's coastal mission.

**Learn more about our work on the San Mateo County coast, and our updated Agricultural Policy at [openspace.org/Coastside](https://openspace.org/Coastside).**



Cattle that are part of Midpen's conservation grazing program help maintain important open grassland habitat around the Turtle Ponds in La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve that native frogs, snakes and western pond turtles need to complete their life cycles. (Frances Freyberg)

## New Discoveries in Coastal Preserves

Plants Not Seen in Over a Century Found in Grazed Areas

Recently, Midpen rangeland ecologist and botanist Lewis Reed stumbled across a tarweed at Tunitas Creek Open Space Preserve that he did not recognize, a find that would lead him to discover not one, but three locally rare native plants. There are over 30 plants classified as tarweeds, so it can be easy to overlook these common flowers. Upon closer inspection, however, there is an incredible diversity of form in these beautiful plants.

After consulting a plant identification book and some microscope work, Reed concluded that the plant was a clustered tarweed (*Deinandra fasciculata*), a species that has not been recorded in the area since the 1800s and has never been documented in San Mateo County. These yellow-flowered plants bloom from August through October, providing crucial floral resources for pollinating

insects in the heat of late summer and early fall, when many other flowering plants are done blooming.

Inspired by this first discovery, Reed took a closer look at other tarweeds he had come across but never stopped to identify. This led to the identification of a hayfield tarweed subspecies (*Hemizonia congesta* ssp. *lutescens*), which seems common in our area but has never been officially documented.

A spiky tarplant growing in a dry livestock pond at La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve also caught Reed's eye. The plant was thriving in a unique environment that is inhospitable to many other species due to its cyclical winter flooding and summer drying. Reed identified the plant as pappose tarplant (*Centromadia parryi* ssp. *parryi*), a rare plant at the state level.

Tarplants earn their name from the aromatic resins they produce that help protect them from being eaten by wildlife and livestock alike. All three of these tarplants were found on portions of coastal Midpen preserves that are part of our conservation grazing program.

"Within the grassland community, native plants like these tend to benefit from conservation grazing. These small-seeded wildflowers are not particularly competitive with the more pervasive, nonnative annual grasses that dominate local grasslands today," Reed said. "Conservation grazing can help moderate that competition, and the fact that these three species have their own defenses against herbivory also helps ensure their success."

Coastal grasslands are one of the most biodiverse and threatened ecosystems in North America. They can benefit from periodic disturbances to prevent the loss of their native biodiversity to introduced species, shrubs and forest. These disturbances, that today are provided in part by conservation grazing with cattle, were historically provided by grazing

**"One of the things that's so special about living and working in our area is this incredibly rich and unique biodiversity, and that means that there are still discoveries to be made. This work is critical to protecting the unique biological heritage of our region."**

—Midpen rangeland ecologist and botanist Lewis Reed

wildlife herds no longer present on the landscape, natural fires and Native American burning practices.

**You can contribute to our understanding of the plants and wildlife in Midpen preserves by sharing your observations to Midpen's Biodiversity Index Project using the iNaturalist app. Learn more at [openspace.org/inaturalist](https://openspace.org/inaturalist).**



This clustered tarweed found in Tunitas Creek Open Space Preserve is the first to be documented in the region since the 1800s. (Lewis Reed/Midpen)



Pappose tarweeds are classified as rare in California. This one, found blooming in a seasonally dry pond at La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve, provides nectar to a field crescent butterfly. (Lewis Reed/Midpen)



The hayfield tarweed has never been officially documented in our area until now. (Lewis Reed/Midpen)

## Safe Passage for Newts

Wildlife Crossing Project Initiated by Community Scientists

Why did the newt cross the road? To get to its winter breeding grounds. During the rainy season, California newts (*Taricha torosa*), along with other semiaquatic species, journey from their dry season habitats in the woodlands and chaparral of Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve down to the Lexington Reservoir and creeks near the Town of Los Gatos. For the population of California newts in this location the journey can be difficult, and many newts perish trying to cross Alma Bridge Road.



Santa Clara County and stakeholders including Valley Water, Peninsula Open Space Trust, neighbors, recreational groups and a cadre of community scientists — recently narrowed down the wildlife crossing for the newts to two viable options featuring elevated sections of roadway coupled with wildlife passage under the road.

With solutions identified, the project team is now creating designs and conducting environmental studies required under California law. Midpen has also applied for a \$2,120,000 Wildlife Conservation Board grant to help offset the costs of this current phase of the project, estimated at \$2,884,000 and anticipated to be complete in 2025.

Total costs to complete design, permitting, construction and monitoring

**Midpen and our partners are working on solutions to help the newts in the Lexington Reservoir area avoid collisions with vehicles during their annual migration.**

"Unfortunately, one of the largest recorded wildlife roadkill events in California happens to newts migrating from Sierra Azul Preserve to Lexington Reservoir," Midpen senior biologist and project manager Julie Andersen said. "Roads that help people move from place to place can act as barriers for wildlife, cutting off or limiting access to breeding grounds or food sources."

The project team —made up of Midpen,

## O Christmas Tree!

Returning a Former Tree Farm to its Roots

Logging mills. Millionaire's mansions. Hillside vineyards. These are a few examples of how the land that is now Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve was utilized by people before Midpen acquired it in 1999. Today, a 12-acre former Christmas tree farm still remains within this public open space preserve as part of its storied history of human uses. While not an obvious scar on the land, the overgrown and densely packed commercially bred Douglas fir trees, which are genetically distinct from local native Douglas firs, have replaced the area's natural biodiversity.

Restoring the natural environment is a keystone of Midpen's mission. Recently, we began a project to restore the tree farm site to more natural conditions by removing most of the planted former Christmas trees and invasive species, implementing erosion control measures and eventually reseeding and planting the site with an array of native trees and plants.

**The ultimate long-term goal is to transform the area back into a native oak woodland featuring species like coast live oak, California black oak, tanoak, redwood and Pacific madrone.**

"While it may seem counterintuitive to remove trees to support the health of a forest, this site is far from what you would see in a natural forest. It lacks the structural and species diversity that provide quality habitat for native wildlife and promote wildland fire resiliency," Midpen forest ecologist and project manager Ari Camponuri said.

"Biodiversity is the backbone of forest resiliency. A healthy forest is a mosaic featuring a variety of types of trees that vary in size, spacing and stages of development."

Camponuri's vision for the site stands in stark contrast to the overgrown thicket of long-forgotten Christmas trees that dominate the site today, inhibiting light from reaching the forest floor and leading to a dearth of understory plants.

In 2019, Midpen successfully restored a less than 2-acre area of this former tree farm as a pilot project that is now being scaled up. The current phase of the project underway now will complete the full site restoration within the next several years.

Also at this site, Midpen is partnering with a graduate student from San José State University who is researching the ideal conditions for oak tree growth. This area of study is increasingly important as the plant disease sudden oak death threatens oak woodlands throughout the Santa Cruz Mountains and beyond.



Commercially bred Christmas trees are genetically distinct from native Douglas firs in our region. (Frances Freyberg)

along 4 miles of roadway is estimated at \$28.5 to \$33.5 million dollars. The start of construction is dependent on completing the required environmental review and permitting and securing funding.

"Although Midpen does not have jurisdiction over the roadway, we are committed to working with the county, other regional partners and neighboring landowners to support implementation of long-term solutions to reduce road-related newt mortality," Andersen said.

The newt mortality problem first came to light in 2017 after community scientists began tracking vehicle collisions with newts along Alma Bridge Road. Midpen and Peninsula Open Space Trust funded a study which found that of the nearly 14,000 adult California newts that tried crossing Alma Bridge Road during the winter of 2020, 39 percent were fatally struck. Community scientists have recorded more than 34,000 California newt deaths on this roadway since 2017. If the trend continues without intervention, this population of California newts could be at risk of local extinction in the coming decades.

"We are lucky to have committed partners, from public agencies to environmental advocates, who are all working together to protect this local California newt population and create a more wildlife-friendly roadway," Andersen said.

**Learn more about the project at [openspace.org/newt-passage](https://openspace.org/newt-passage).**

### MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT

Midpen helps plants, animals and people thrive throughout the greater Santa Cruz Mountains region by preserving a connected greenbelt of more than 70,000 acres of public open space. Midpen is a public agency created in 1972 by a grassroots voter initiative to protect the green spaces in parts of Santa Clara, San Mateo and Santa Cruz counties. We manage 27 open space preserves with more than 250 miles of trails for you to explore, free of charge, all year long.

**Our Mission:** To acquire and preserve a regional greenbelt of open space land in perpetuity, protect and restore the natural environment and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education.

**Our mission on the San Mateo County Coast:** To acquire and preserve in perpetuity open space land and agricultural land of regional significance, protect and restore the natural environment, preserve rural character, encourage viable agricultural use of land resources and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education.

### BOARD MEETINGS

Are held on the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month at 7 p.m. in-person and via Zoom. For details visit [openspace.org/board-meetings](https://openspace.org/board-meetings).

Ana María Ruiz, General Manager  
Leigh Ann Gessner, Open Space Views Editor  
Ellen Tjosvold, Guided Activities Editor



Midpen is restoring a dense, overgrown former Christmas tree farm that is now part of Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve into a native oak woodland, creating a healthier forest that will support a wider diversity of native plants and animals and be more resilient to potential wildland fire. (Frances Freyberg)

Cognizant of this disease, which is unfortunately widespread throughout Bear Creek Redwoods Preserve, staff and contractors are required to regularly sanitize boots, equipment and machinery to prevent further spread.

The restoration work is conducted with respect for local wildlife. Just before the removal of the former Christmas trees began, the on-site biologist spotted several dusky-footed woodrat nests, pausing work until their nests were relocated. This compacted an already tight work window, which is limited by nesting birds in the spring and the onset of winter.

Natural forests include standing dead

trees, called snags, that provide important habitat particularly for birds. To replicate this diversity of habitat, a few select former Christmas trees will be left standing but will be "girdled," resulting in the death of the tree over time.

"When you walk through this overgrown former tree farm, you can see it's not a natural forest," Camponuri explained as she pointed out the lack of understory plants, intertwining branches and dense, uniform rows of trees competing for sunlight. "By restoring this site to a native oak woodland, over time it will be much healthier, more resilient and full of life."

**Learn more at [openspace.org/forest](https://openspace.org/forest).**



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## Stay Connected to Your Open Space

Sign up to receive Midpen's monthly e-newsletter and updates on preserves and projects.  
[openspace.org/opt-in](https://openspace.org/opt-in)

Follow us on social media:



## La Honda Creek Preserve's Grasshopper Loop Trail Seasonally Reopens to Dogs On-Leash December 15

Opened in 2022, this 1.3-mile easy-access loop trail provides seasonal on-leash dog access from mid-December through July in order to balance ecologically sensitive public access, environmental protection and active conservation grazing in the preserve. The trail is open year-round for hiking.

Learn more and plan your visit at [openspace.org/La-Honda-Creek](https://openspace.org/La-Honda-Creek).

## New Midpen App First of its Kind

Interactive Trail-Finding Tool Inspired by Visitor Input

It took Midpen planning department interns more than three years to walk all 254.7 miles of Midpen's trails. Every step of the way, they were tasked with gathering data on trail steepness, elevation, width, shadiness, surface material and more.

Our award-winning Geographic Information Systems (GIS) team took those thousands of collected data points and turned them into a user-friendly web-based app called Trail Explorer, which just launched for public use on November 15; International GIS day.

"We're really excited to share this new tool with the public," Midpen GIS program administrator Jamie Hawk, who led the development of the app, said. "It's the first of its kind. We don't know of any other agency that offers this level of detail and accuracy about recreational trails to their visitors."

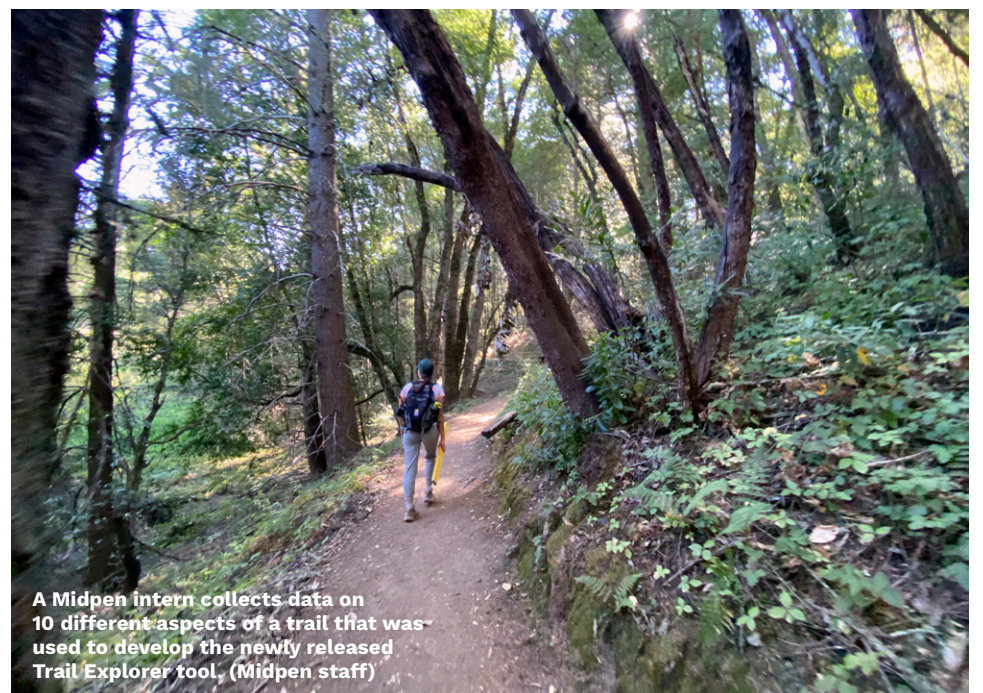
The Trail Explorer tool provides an interactive online experience designed to help preserve visitors plan an outing before they head out to a Midpen preserve. The app is accessible through a web browser from an internet-connected device. Visitors can filter for up to 10 different trail criteria and identify specific Midpen trails that meet their desired experience.

Inspiration for this app was reinforced by the results of two in-person preserve-user surveys Midpen conducted in 2018 and 2020.

"Two-thirds of our surveyed visitors agreed that slope, or trail steepness, is critical to their trip planning," Midpen data analyst Francisco Lopez Tapia, who designed and built the app, said. "That's why we feature slope prominently on the map with bold, intuitive colors."

Midpen's enduring mission of open space preservation, environmental restoration and ecologically sensitive public enjoyment makes a visit to our preserves distinct. Midpen trails can be remote, providing a wildland experience in nature very different from a city or county park.

Midpen adheres to a Leave No Trace



**"We're really excited to share this new tool with the public. Visitors can filter for 10 different trail criteria. We don't know of any other agency that offers this level of detail and accuracy about recreational trails to their visitors."** —Midpen GIS program administrator Jamie Hawk

ethic, meaning visitors must leave nature as they found it by taking out everything that they bring in, while respecting the plants and wildlife who make the preserves their home and refuge.

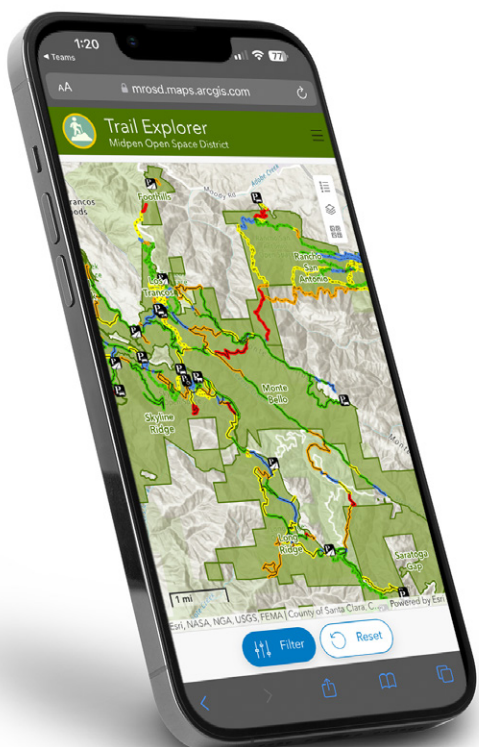
One way Midpen staff carry out and balance the different tenets of our mission is by putting a lot of care, thought, technical analysis and public input into where and how we build trails and which uses are compatible in specific areas.

The result is a large system of public trails spanning the Peninsula, South Bay and San Mateo County coast that is protective of the natural environment while providing a variety of

experiences in nature. These range from tranquil areas for contemplative nature study to places that families with a wide range of abilities and mobilities can enjoy together, challenging routes for those looking to exercise outdoors and more.

The increase in visitation during the pandemic underscored the role Midpen's public trails, which are free and open daily, play in providing our community with equitable access to nature for the physical, mental and emotional health benefits they provide.

**Try out the new Trail Explorer app to find the Midpen trail experience that best suits you at [openspace.org/maps](https://openspace.org/maps).**





# Winter 2023-2024 Docent Naturalist Guided Activities

A double rainbow over Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve. (Sandy Bartlett)

Are you ready to explore and enjoy the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District preserves? We invite you to discover these extraordinary places that include many thousands of acres of permanently protected open space, from redwood forest to bay shoreline. All guided activities are developed and provided by docent naturalists who have completed an extensive training program. These docents volunteer their time to enrich your experiences and share knowledge with you about natural and cultural history.

To pique your interest, take a look here at the list of guided activities and then refer to our website [openspace.org/guided-activities](https://openspace.org/guided-activities) for all additional needed details. The activities are FREE and only some require reservations. Please note that some preserves have more than one access point and some activities meet at a preserve or location other than where the guided activity will occur. If there is no special "where to meet" information then the activity meets at the preserve's main parking lot.

## December

### Wonders of Cherry Springs

Saturday, December 2  
9:35 a.m. – 1:10 p.m.  
Sierra Azul Preserve  
Meet: Directions emailed  
2.5 miles [M](#) [B](#)

### Birding on the Boardwalk

Saturday, December 2  
10 a.m. – Noon  
Ravenswood Preserve  
3 miles [E](#) [W](#)



Wood duck (Bob Slate)

### Early Winter Surprises

Sunday, December 3  
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.  
Long Ridge Preserve  
4.5 miles [M](#) [L](#)

### Earthquake Walk

Sunday, December 3  
1 – 4 p.m.  
Los Trancos Preserve  
2.5 miles [M](#)

### Explorer Hike: Wintertime Traditions

Wednesday, December 6  
10:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.  
Long Ridge Preserve  
4.5 miles [M](#) [L](#)

### Little Naturalists

Wednesday, December 6  
2 – 4 p.m.  
Windy Hill Preserve  
Meet: Lower Windy Hill Parking Area  
2 miles [E](#) [F](#) [B](#)

### Untold Story of Oaks

Friday, December 8  
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.  
Russian Ridge Preserve  
Meet: Mindego Gateway Parking Area  
3.5 miles [M](#)

### Ramble at Rancho

Monday, December 11  
9 a.m. – 1 p.m.  
Rancho San Antonio Preserve  
Meet: Lot 6  
7 miles [S](#) [L](#)

### Signs of Winter

Wednesday, December 13  
9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.  
Pulgas Ridge Preserve  
4.2 miles [M](#)

### Scenic Aerobic Hike

Wednesday, December 13  
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.  
Long Ridge Preserve  
5 miles [S](#)

### What's in a Name? Woods Trail Trees

Saturday, December 16  
9 a.m. – Noon  
Sierra Azul Preserve  
Meet: Jacques Ridge Parking Area  
3 miles [M](#)

### Listening to the Trees

Saturday, December 16  
9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.  
Skyline Ridge Preserve  
Meet: Russian Ridge Parking Area  
3 miles [E](#) [F](#) [L](#)

### Fleas Navidad

Sunday, December 17  
9:30 – 11 a.m.  
Pulgas Ridge Preserve  
2.5 miles [M](#) [D](#) [B](#)

### Water Wonders

Monday, December 18  
10 a.m. – Noon  
Monte Bello Preserve  
3.5 miles [M](#) [L](#)

### Escape the Holiday Madness

Saturday, December 23  
10 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.  
Picchetti Ranch Preserve  
4.5 miles [M](#) [L](#)

### Geocaching Hike

Saturday, December 23  
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.  
Los Trancos Preserve  
2.5 miles [E](#) [F](#) [L](#) [B](#)

### A Road Less Traveled

Monday, December 25  
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.  
Skyline Ridge Preserve  
Meet: Russian Ridge Parking Area  
4 miles [M](#)

### Morning Meander: Salt Marsh to Bay

Wednesday, December 27  
9 – 11 a.m.  
Stevens Creek Shoreline Nature Area  
2 miles [E](#)

### Trail Trek Thursday

Thursday, December 28  
9:30 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.  
Fremont Older Preserve  
5.6 miles [S](#) [L](#)



Emily Raciti

## January

### Water Wonders

Tuesday, January 2  
9 a.m. – Noon  
Picchetti Ranch Preserve  
4.5 miles [M](#) [L](#)

### Explorer Hike: New Year's Resolution

Wednesday, January 3  
10:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.  
El Corte de Madera Creek Preserve  
Meet: Skeggs Point Parking Area  
4 miles [S](#) [L](#)

### Amazing Banana Slugs

Saturday, January 6  
9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.  
Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve  
Meet: Redwood Roadside Parking  
2 miles [E](#) [F](#) [L](#)

### Fault Lines and Hippies

Sunday, January 7  
1 – 3:30 p.m.  
Los Trancos Preserve  
2 miles [M](#)

### Qi Gong in the Winter

Monday, January 8  
1 – 3:30 p.m.  
Windy Hill Preserve  
Meet: Lower Windy Hill Parking Area  
2 miles [E](#)



Winter shadows (Libby Karolczak)

### Scenic Aerobic Hike

Wednesday, January 10  
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.  
Rancho San Antonio Preserve  
Meet: Lot 6  
5 miles [S](#)

### Fungal Fun

Saturday, January 13  
9 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.  
Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve  
Meet: North Ridge Parking Area  
7 miles [S](#) [L](#)

### Winter Birding at Sausal Pond

Sunday, January 14  
9 a.m. – Noon  
Windy Hill Preserve  
Meet: Lower Windy Hill Parking Area  
2 miles [E](#)

### In Search of Lemonade Springs

Sunday, January 14  
10:30 a.m. – 2 p.m.  
Long Ridge Preserve  
5 miles [M](#) [L](#)

### Signs of Winter

Wednesday, January 17  
9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.  
Pulgas Ridge Preserve  
4.2 miles [M](#)

### Explorer Hike: Winter Waterfowl

Wednesday, January 17  
10:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.  
Stevens Creek Shoreline Nature Area  
4 miles [E](#) [L](#)

### What's in a Name? Redwoods

Saturday, January 20  
9 a.m. – Noon  
Thornewood Preserve  
3.5 miles [M](#)

### Geocaching Hike

Saturday, January 20  
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.  
Skyline Ridge Preserve  
Meet: Russian Ridge Parking Area  
2.5 miles [F](#) [M](#) [L](#) [B](#)

### Morning Meander: Winter Habitats

Wednesday, January 24  
9 – 11:30 a.m.  
Windy Hill Preserve  
Meet: Lower Windy Hill Parking Area  
2.4 miles [E](#)

### Mindego Hill Summit

Wednesday, January 24  
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.  
Russian Ridge Preserve  
Meet: Mindego Gateway Parking Area  
5 miles [S](#) [L](#)

### Trail Trek Thursday

Thursday, January 25  
9 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.  
Russian Ridge Preserve  
5.5 miles [S](#)



Deer (John Kesselring)

### Ramble at Rancho

Monday, January 29  
9 a.m. – 1 p.m.  
Rancho San Antonio Preserve  
Meet: Lot 6  
6.5 miles [S](#) [L](#)

## February

### Wonders of Cherry Springs

Saturday, February 3  
9:25 a.m. – 1:10 p.m.  
Sierra Azul Preserve  
Meet: Directions emailed  
2.5 miles [M](#) [B](#)

### History on Two Wheels

Saturday, February 3  
9:30 a.m. – Noon  
Fremont Older Preserve  
11 miles [S](#) [B](#) [R](#)

### Family Night Hike

Saturday, February 3  
6 – 9 p.m.  
Skyline Ridge Preserve  
Meet: Russian Ridge Parking Area  
2 miles [E](#) [F](#) [B](#)



Banana Slug (Mark Gerow)

### Scenic Skyline Sampler

Sunday, February 4  
9 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.  
Skyline Ridge Preserve  
7.5 miles [S](#) [L](#)

### Earthquake Walk

Sunday, February 4  
1 – 3:30 p.m.  
Los Trancos Preserve  
2 miles [M](#)

### What's in a Name? Mudflat Margins

Wednesday, February 7  
9 a.m. – Noon  
Ravenswood Preserve  
2.5 miles [E](#)

### Explorer Hike: Watershed Walk

Wednesday, February 7  
10:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.  
Picchetti Ranch Preserve  
4.5 miles [S](#) [L](#)

### The Magic of Oak Woodlands

Friday, February 9  
9:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.  
Windy Hill Preserve  
Meet: Lower Windy Hill Parking Area  
5.75 miles [S](#)

### Wandering the Watershed

Friday, February 9  
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.  
Monte Bello Preserve  
3 miles [M](#)

## Welcoming Winter

The tilt of earth's axis causes the seasons. With the Northern Hemisphere tilted away from the sun in the winter we get shorter, cooler days during which the sun appears low in the sky and at the least angle to Earth. Despite that these are wetter months of the year, it is still a wonderful time to explore open spaces.

The increased moisture showcases fungi, lichen and animals such as newts, banana slugs and migrating birds. The redwood forest comes alive in the mist and rain, while grasslands take advantage of the water availability and soak it up with their deep root systems.

Later in the winter, as the days stretch longer and the temperature warms, you'll see clues of spring's arrival with budding plants and early-blooming wildflowers.

When visiting open spaces this winter, be prepared by checking the weather report, bringing more layered or waterproof clothing, and, as usual, being aware of sunset times.

Learn more at [openspace.org/know-before](https://openspace.org/know-before).



A hiker enjoying a winter view from Long Ridge Open Space Preserve. (Leigh Ann Gessner/Midpen)

### Slugs and Sandstone

Saturday, February 10  
1 – 4:00 p.m.  
El Corte de Madera Creek Preserve  
Meet: Skeggs Point Parking Area  
3.4 miles [M](#)

### Earthquake 101

Sunday, February 11  
1 – 2:30 p.m.  
Los Trancos Preserve  
2.5 miles [M](#)

### Ramble at Rancho

Monday, February 12  
9 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.  
Rancho San Antonio Preserve  
Meet: Lot 6  
5.4 miles [S](#)

### Rogue Valley Aerobic Hike

Tuesday, February 13  
8:45 – 11:30 a.m.  
Rancho San Antonio Preserve  
Meet: Lot 6  
6 miles [S](#)

### Signs of Early Spring

Tuesday, February 13  
9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.  
Pulgas Ridge Preserve  
4.2 miles [M](#)

### Of Love & Language

Wednesday, February 14  
9 a.m. – 2 p.m.  
Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve  
Meet: North Ridge Parking Area  
7 miles [S](#) [L](#)

### Scenic Aerobic Hike

Wednesday, February 14  
10 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.  
Picchetti Ranch Preserve  
5 miles [S](#)

## Legend

- [E](#) **Easy Hike/Walk:** Flat to gently rolling hills. Total elevation gain less than 200 feet. Leisurely pace. Frequent stops. Usually less than 3 miles.
- [M](#) **Moderate Hike:** Steeper or more frequent uphill grades. Total elevation gain 200 to 600 feet. Leisurely to moderate pace. Usually between 3 and 5 miles.
- [S](#) **Strenuous Hike:** Steep hills and/or long distances. Total elevation gain greater than 600 feet. Moderate to vigorous pace. Usually more than 5 miles.
- [B](#) **Bike Intermediate:** Intended for participants with dirt single-track riding experience; able to climb and descend steep and moderately rough trails. Recreational ride at a moderate/brisk pace; 8+ miles on a wide range of fire roads and single-track trails. For experienced riders in very good physical condition with good endurance.
- [L](#) **Meal/Snack Break:** Bring a lunch, dinner or snack as appropriate.
- [F](#) **Family Friendly:** Suitable for children; must be accompanied and supervised by an adult. See the activity description for any additional information.
- [W](#) **Wheelchair Accessible**
- [D](#) **Dogs:** All dogs must be on a leash, well-behaved and socialized. Please bring water for your dog and be prepared to carry out dog waste.
- [R](#) **Online Reservations Required:** [openspace.org/guided-activities](https://openspace.org/guided-activities) will accept reservations two weeks in advance of an activity date and allow a maximum of four people per reservation. No walk-up participation allowed. Please cancel your reservation if you can no longer attend.

### Fungal Fun

Sunday, February 18  
9 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.  
Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve  
Meet: North Ridge Parking Area  
5 miles [S](#) [L](#)



Fungus (Randy Weber)

### Explorer Hike: A Four Park Loop

Wednesday, February 21  
10:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.  
Saratoga Gap Preserve  
5 miles [M](#) [L](#)

### Trail Trek Thursday

Thursday, February 22  
9 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.  
Windy Hill Preserve  
Meet: Lower Windy Hill Parking Area  
6 miles [S](#)

### Winter Pond-ering

Saturday, February 24  
9:30 a.m. – Noon  
Picchetti Ranch Preserve  
3 miles [E](#) [F](#) [L](#)

### Morning Meander: Up for Flowers

Wednesday, February 28  
9 a.m. – Noon  
Pulgas Ridge Preserve  
2.5 miles [M](#)