



# VIEWS

QUARTERLY NEWS FROM THE MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT · SPRING 2021



Mount Umunhum in the Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve by Lubor Ptacek

## People & Plants Persevere on an Island in the Sky

Restoring Mount Umunhum's Native Plants is Labor of Love

At the summit of Mount Umunhum in the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve, a community of exceptionally hardy wildflowers are beginning to bloom. With the help of dedicated Midpen staff and volunteers, these slow-growing native plants are reclaiming their home among rocky sandstone and serpentine soils atop one of the highest peaks in the Bay Area.

Mount Umunhum's summit was significantly altered in the 1950s to create the Almaden Air Force Station, part of the mountain's storied history which visitors can learn about. Midpen began the first step in the difficult process of restoring Mount Umunhum's summit in 2015 by moving the original soils back into place and reforming the mountain's natural peak. We partnered with Grassroots Ecology to



Silver tip lupine by Amanda Mills/Midpen

garden trowels are no match for the mountain's soils. A demolition hammer was needed to dig holes for the more than 4,300 new plants that have been installed at the summit by many caring hands.

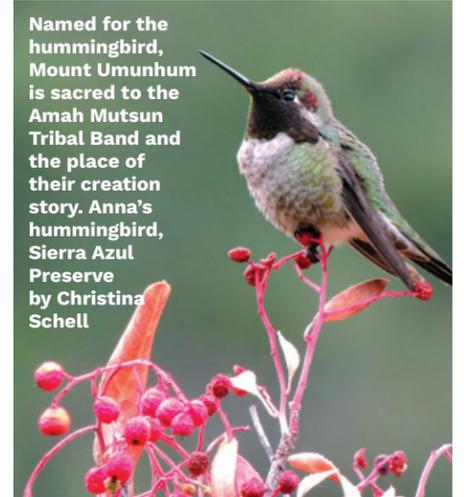
"Mount Umunhum is a special site that provides a unique opportunity to learn about vegetation restoration," Midpen Natural Resources Specialist Amanda Mills said. "Many volunteers showed up for multiple planting days over several years. Nothing deters them, including digging in these difficult soils."

As spring emerges, the fruits of their labor are apparent as the once-barren summit is reclaimed by its native plant community.

### The many locally rare plants and unique geology of this isolated mountain peak make Mount Umunhum an island of biodiversity in the sky.

collect seeds from plants that evolved to withstand Mount Umunhum's harsh conditions, and grew them into seedlings to replant at the rocky summit.

Early on, we learned valuable lessons. In 2017, as Midpen prepared to open Mount Umunhum to the public for the first time, it became apparent that

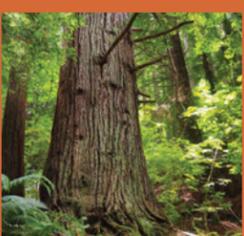


Named for the hummingbird, Mount Umunhum is sacred to the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and the place of their creation story. Anna's hummingbird, Sierra Azul Preserve by Christina Schell



Before the pandemic, volunteers plant seedlings in the rocky soils at Mount Umunhum's restored summit, by Golden Hour Restoration

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE



**Open Space Working for You**  
Realizing our community-supported vision for public open space fueled by Measure AA.



**Free Virtual Events**  
Join Midpen online for a wildflower tour, bat talk, children's nature story time and more.



**Family-Friendly Midpen Trails**  
Five diverse, easy-access outings people of all ages and abilities can enjoy this spring.

# Outdoor Activities Spring 2021

March • April • May [openspace.org/activities](https://openspace.org/activities)

Sunshine and showers. Green hills and bright blossoms. Spring, the harbinger of longer days and more time out on the trails usually accompanies a full schedule of our docent naturalist-led outings and open doors at the Daniels Nature Center. This spring, we continue promoting our self-guided walks and virtual nature events, and welcome you to explore on your own and with your household until we can reopen our in-person activities.

We hope you will refer to Midpen's website frequently and in particular the [openspace.org/virtual-nature](https://openspace.org/virtual-nature) page for updates and new content we are curating. Be sure to also check out and follow Midpen on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn to engage and learn with us.

Here's to the promise of summer and autumn — remember to look at the [openspace.org/activities](https://openspace.org/activities) page to find out when docent guided adventures will return to the preserves.



Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve by Julia Davies

## 5 Easy-Access Midpen Trails for All to Enjoy

### Oak Woodland

#### Cordilleras Trail

##### Pulgas Ridge Open Space Preserve

The trails in Pulgas Ridge Preserve follow canyons and ridgetops with views toward the bay and surrounding hillsides. In early spring, visitors can enjoy native wildflowers including Indian warrior, hound's tongue, mule's ears and milkmaids. Three members of the lily family are early spring bloomers here: fetid adder's tongue, giant trillium and mission bells. This preserve allows dogs and offers an off-leash dog area for your four-legged friends. The accessible Cordilleras Trail brings visitors into a quiet wooded valley along Cordilleras Creek. Plan your visit at [openspace.org/pulgas-ridge](https://openspace.org/pulgas-ridge).

### Redwood Forest

#### Upper Lake Loop Trail

##### Bear Creek Redwoods Preserve

This preserve offers second-growth redwood and Douglas fir forests and oak woodlands on the doorstep of Silicon Valley. The Upper Lake Loop Trail is an easy 0.2-mile walk around Upper

Lake, featuring habitat restoration sites and historical artifacts. Download the self-guided interpretive tour online to learn about the fascinating history, wildlife and habitats of this area. This easy-access trail is suitable for the all ages and abilities to enjoy. Plan your visit at [openspace.org/bcr](https://openspace.org/bcr).

### Mountain Peak

#### Mount Umunhum

##### Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve

At Mount Umunhum's summit, visitors experience breathtaking 360-degree views including the Pacific Ocean, and on a clear day the Sierra Nevada. Discover unique plants and animals living in this extreme environment, learn about the mountain's significance to the Native American community and explore remnants of Cold War history. The summit's accessible parking, vault toilets, shade shelters and pathways welcome people of all ages and abilities. You can download the *Stories of Mount Umunhum* app for a self-guided audio tour and plan your visit at [openspace.org/mount-umunhum](https://openspace.org/mount-umunhum).

### Bayshore Wetland

#### Ravenswood Trail

##### Ravenswood Open Space Preserve

This easy 1.9-mile trail is a wonderful place for bird watching, biking or simply enjoying the San Francisco Bay wetlands. Take in views from the overlook platforms and benches, which are accessible to visitors with wheelchairs or strollers. Learn about the wildlife that make their home or migrate through these important wetlands, and more, with a free self-guided interpretive tour of Ravenswood Preserve in English and Spanish using the OuterSpatial app. Restrooms are not available at the preserve. Plan your visit at [openspace.org/ravenswood](https://openspace.org/ravenswood).



Alpine Pond by Karl Gohl

### Peaceful Pond

#### Alpine Pond Loop Trail

##### Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve

Explore the shore of Alpine Pond, including via a wheelchair accessible floating pier. Enjoy lunch at picnic tables adjacent to the pond. A drinking fountain, bicycle rack and vault toilets are available. Download a self-guided pond tour in English, Spanish or Mandarin to learn about the native plants and wildlife found around the ponds, and plan your visit at [openspace.org/skyline-ridge](https://openspace.org/skyline-ridge).

Find more trails and places to explore at [openspace.org/preserves](https://openspace.org/preserves)

## Virtual Events

### March

#### Introduction to Hiking

##### Q&A with Latino Outdoors

Thursday, March 11 at 6 p.m.



Emily McNally

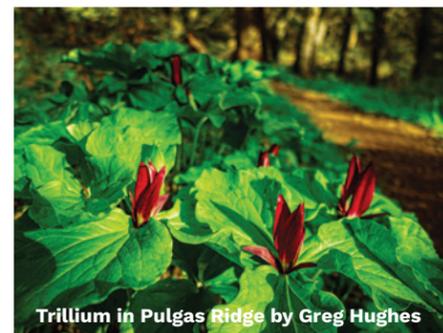
### April

#### Children's Nature Storybook Reading in Spanish with Midpen General Manager Ana Ruiz

Saturday, April 10 at 10 a.m.

#### Bay Area Bats Demystified with Midpen Biologist Matt Sharp Chaney

Thursday, April 15 at noon



Trillium in Pulgas Ridge by Greg Hughes

### May

#### Lunch & Learn: Spring Wildflower Tour at Pulgas Ridge Preserve with Bay Area Older Adults

Thursday, May 13 at noon

Get details and register, and find more virtual events to enjoy including Indigenous history, virtual tours in multiple languages and much more at [openspace.org](https://openspace.org)



Family hiking in Monte Bello Open Space Preserve by Jessica Lucas-Ingram/Midpen

## Know Before You Go

### 1 PLAN AHEAD BEFORE YOU LEAVE HOME

Check regulations and weather; download a map; pack water, face covering, hand sanitizer and first aid; have a Plan B in case the parking area is already full.

### 2 PLAY IT SAFE AND GIVE OTHERS SPACE

Choose low-impact activities, go slow and stay within your limits. Maintain 6 feet of distance from those not in your household. Keep groups small, avoid crowds and give others space to pass. Observe wildlife from a distance too!

### 3 EXPLORE LOCALLY

Limit long-distance travel and find nature close to home.

### 4 KEEP IT CLEAN

Pack out what you pack in. Remember, there are no trash cans in Midpen preserves. Leave nature as you found it.

### 5 WELCOME OTHERS ON THE TRAIL

Treat people of all identities and abilities with kindness and respect.

Visit [openspace.org](https://openspace.org) for up-to-date information on closures, preserve information and maps.



Jack Owicki

# Nature is Essential

A year ago, most of us darted about in our busy-ness, largely detached from the natural world, save for the occasional weekend hike or vacation trip to the mountains or beach. Then came the pandemic and the world as we knew it stopped.



Ana María Ruiz

From that ensuing darkness shines at least one bright spot: the lengthy shelter-at-home orders, designed to protect our collective health, gave us more time to reset, reflect and reconnect with the great outdoors. Visitors flocked to local trails in record numbers; typical weekend traffic

doubled in Midpen's more popular preserves as people discovered, or rediscovered, our magnificent trails (245 miles and counting!).

Perhaps we started getting outside because it was the only thing to do, or because it offered a safe way to escape the confines of our indoor walls. Perhaps it was for physical exercise to ward off the "COVID-15" or find solace and comfort to alleviate the shock, fear, anxiety and lingering stress. No matter our prompt, we all sought relief in the regenerative effects of human-nature connection.

The nature we perhaps had taken a bit for granted, is now front and center. We see it as essential, and we recognize that, beyond recreation and public health benefits, our public lands represent an opportunity to reimagine our natural spaces as providing essential nature-based services.

When we recognize and protect the ecological processes that support the very existence of life on earth, we increase our resilience to climate change and catastrophic wildland

fire events. The conservation, restoration and care of wetlands ensures clean water and flood protection. The conservation, restoration and care of grasslands and forests ensure clean air and carbon sequestration. By linking habitat and connecting open space areas, we protect the vast array of endemic species that make our region one of the world's top biodiversity hotspots. Many of our region's most iconic wildlife, like mountain lions, bobcats, coyotes and the elusive American badger, are wide-ranging and need large areas of connected habitat to thrive.

On the Coastside, the ecological processes of nature are sustained in both natural and working lands through Midpen's work in preserving agricultural, open space and watershed land of regional significance, and encouraging viable agricultural uses of land resources. We are sustaining local food sources and preserving the rural character of our beloved Coastside as we continue to stitch together a continuous greenbelt of open space lands for wildlife connectivity across the broader landscape.

**“The nature we perhaps had taken a bit for granted is now front and center.”**

steeper, upland areas and nearby creek corridors are forever preserved.

As we rise and move forward with this new year, let us keep nature in the forefront to remind ourselves of the many essential services that nature provides us each and every day.

## 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 nearly 65,000 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 26 open space preserves with 245 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 OF DIRECTORS

Board meetings are held on the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month at 7 p.m. Please visit [openspace.org/board-meetings](https://openspace.org/board-meetings) for details.

Ana María Ruiz, General Manager  
Leigh Ann Gessner, Open Space Views Editor  
Renée Fitzsimons, Outdoor Activities Editor

## Coexisting with Cougars

New Midpen research underway in preserves near urban areas

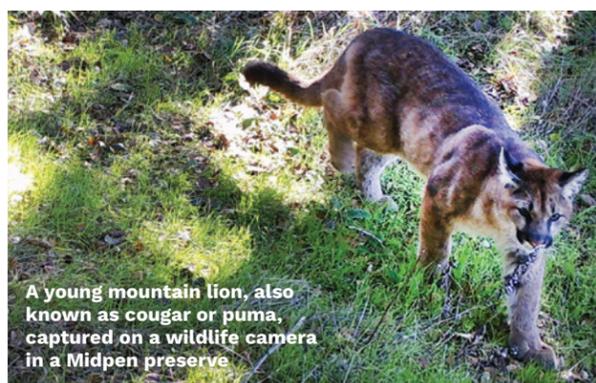
Just before Christmas, a healthy two-year-old female mountain lion in Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve received a temporary GPS tracking collar and the name 115F by scientists with the Santa Cruz Puma Project, as part of a new five-year study to learn more about how mountain lions move through and use open space preserves that are also frequently visited by people. The collar works similar to a fitness tracker and allows the mountain lion to move about freely.

“What we are learning from 115F will help Midpen staff make informed, science-based decisions about how we manage the public lands in our care to benefit and protect both visitors and the long-term conservation of mountain lions,” Midpen Biologist Matt Sharp Chaney, who is leading the research project, said.

Rancho San Antonio Preserve is enjoyed by more than 700,000 visitors annually, and like most undeveloped land in the Bay Area, is also prime mountain lion habitat.

“While the big cats are certainly out there, they normally steer clear of people, so most visitors will never even see one,” Midpen Biologist Karine Tokatlian explained. “As rare as observations are, encounters are even more rare and actual attacks extremely rare, though they have happened in our area. This research is aimed at better understanding human-wildlife conflicts so they can be reduced.”

Mountain lions are native to California and play an important role in our local ecosystem by regulating populations of deer, their primary food. Mountain lions are secretive, generally avoid people and are mainly active at night, making them challenging animals to study. They require large home ranges of up to 200-square miles and face many challenges to their long-term survival, primarily due to habitat fragmentation from roads and development that have led to habitat loss, vehicle collisions, rodenticide poisoning and genetic inbreeding due to geographic isolation.



A young mountain lion, also known as cougar or puma, captured on a wildlife camera in a Midpen preserve

In Rancho San Antonio Preserve, we are also using motion-activated still wildlife cameras to identify trends in the wildlife population and learn how different animals respond to changes in their environment.

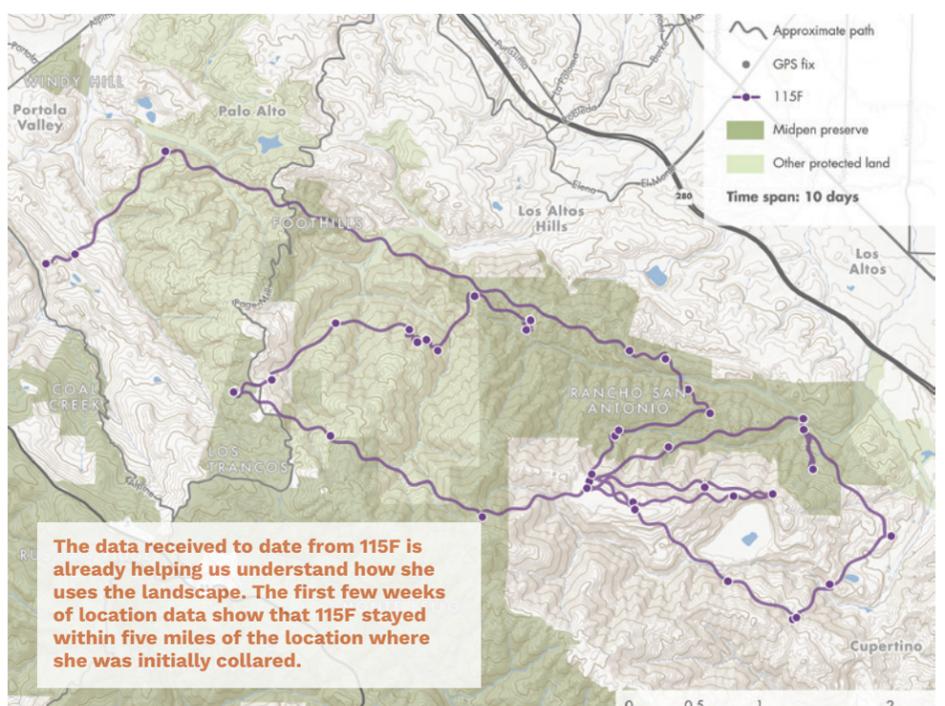
The cameras are used for wildlife research only and are placed in a grid system used internationally by scientists. Preliminary images confirm the diversity of species that reside throughout this heavily visited preserve including grey fox, bobcat, various birds and rodents. We have also seen a few rare species including red fox (an introduced species) and a native spotted skunk.

**By sharing what we learn through this research, Midpen hopes to help our community safely coexist with these magnificent creatures.**

The data received to date from 115F is already helping us understand how she uses the landscape. We plan to expand the collaring study into other popular Midpen preserves that lie near urban areas, including Fremont Older and Picchetti Ranch preserves.

Learn more about Midpen's new mountain lion research in partnership with the Santa Cruz Puma Project, see the latest images from Midpen's new wildlife camera study at Rancho San Antonio Preserve and watch a video of 115F captured by a private citizen's wildlife camera in the Los Altos Hills at [openspace.org/mountain-lion](https://openspace.org/mountain-lion).

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A wildlife camera in Rancho San Antonio Preserve captured a black-tailed deer overlooking the urban area beyond



### Connection is Key to Conservation

Connecting preserved open space lands so that far-ranging wildlife, such as mountain lions, can safely move across the landscape and avoid people and developed areas is critical to their long-term survival. Midpen is developing a wildlife crossing at Highway 17 near the Town of Los Gatos in a location where data shows many different

wildlife species frequently attempt to cross, often unsuccessfully. This future crossing will connect more than 30,000 acres of protected

public lands and is one of several regional efforts to create connections for wildlife between the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Gabilan Range to the south and Diablo Range to the east.

Along with the wildlife crossing, a separate recreational trail crossing will also be developed, linking more than 50 miles of existing regional trails.

Find out more about this project at [openspace.org/Hwy-17](https://openspace.org/Hwy-17).





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## Stay Connected to Your Open Space

Sign up to receive this printed quarterly newsletter delivered free to your mailbox, or to receive monthly email updates in our *Plug Into Nature* e-newsletter.

[openspace.org/subscribe](https://openspace.org/subscribe)

Follow us on social media:



## Call for Entries!

**12th Annual Photo Contest Begins April 1**

Full contest details at [openspace.org/contest](https://openspace.org/contest)

## Your Measure AA Funds at Work for Open Space

### Progress on Midpen Vision Plan Priority Projects

**W**orking closely with the public, Midpen created a community-supported Vision Plan with 25 priority project areas to guide our work in open space. We have been implementing these projects since 2014, thanks to local voters passing Measure AA, a \$300 million general obligation bond to fund these Vision Plan priority projects.

"Measure AA provides the fuel — the community investment — to make these significant projects happen, furthering our mission to preserve open space, restore the land, provide for public enjoyment and support local agriculture," Midpen General Manager Ana Ruiz said.

As of June 30, 2020, Midpen has invested \$65.1 million in Measure AA funds. Here are five highlights of your Measure AA funds at work. Learn more at [openspace.org/MAA](https://openspace.org/MAA).



Leigh Ann Gessner/Midpen

### Restoring Wildlife Habitat

Protecting plants and animals is integral to Midpen's mission to care for the land. The Measure AA-funded Mindego Pond Improvement Project at Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve restores aquatic habitats for sensitive native species like the federally threatened California red-legged frog and the federally endangered San Francisco garter snake. In this edition, see our Highway 17 Wildlife and Regional Trail Crossings Project, also funded by Measure AA.



Frances Freyberg for Midpen

### Protecting the Coastside

Midpen helps plants, animals and people thrive throughout the greater Santa Cruz Mountains region and on the rural agricultural San Mateo County Coast, where our mission includes preserving agricultural lands of regional significance, preserving rural character and encouraging viable agricultural use of land resources. To date, \$19.9 million in MAA funding has been invested in Coastside open space. This includes preserving open space and agricultural lands, restoring sensitive wildlife habitat such as creeks and ponds, utilizing conservation grazing to enhance native



FUNDED BY  
**MEASURE AA**

### Connecting Communities to Nature

To date, Measure AA funds have opened more than 20 miles of new trail to public access. For example, the new Ravenswood Bay Trail in Midpen's Ravenswood Open Space Preserve closes a critical 0.6-mile gap to establish 80 miles of continuous San Francisco Bay Trail.

John Green for Midpen

coastal grasslands and reduce wildland fire risk, and opening new areas to public access, including lower La Honda Creek Preserve and Mindego Hill in Russian Ridge Preserve.



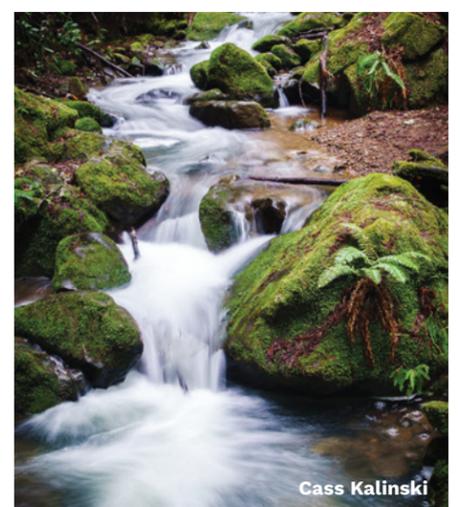
Claire Dawkins

### Preserving Open Space

To date, MAA funds have preserved approximately 2,000 additional acres of public open space, creating opportunities to connect protected landscapes and regional trails. For example, magnificent old-growth redwood trees were preserved as part of a land purchase recently added to Midpen's El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve.

### Caring for the Land

Measure AA funds numerous projects to restore forests and waterways. For example, removing and repairing old, eroding logging roads in Midpen's El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve has significantly improved water quality in the San Gregorio Creek watershed, for people, fish and other wildlife downstream.



Cass Kalinski