



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Date:** April 23, 2020

**Contact:** Leigh Ann Gessner, 650-772-3638, lgessner@openspace.org

### **Midpen Open Space approves purchase of 540 acres on San Mateo County coast**

**Los Altos, CA** — The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District board of directors voted to significantly expand Tunitas Creek Preserve by approving the purchase of more than 540 additional acres from the Peninsula Open Space Trust at their regular public meeting last night.

The property, known as Gordon Ridge, is located along Highway 1 south of Half Moon Bay and north of Highway 84 near San Gregorio. It will bring Midpen's Tunitas Creek Preserve to just over 2,200 contiguous acres supporting an abundance of native plants and wildlife, as well as local agriculture. The purchase is expected to finalize in June for a total of \$9.165 million, offset by a \$1.96 million grant from the California Natural Resources Agency.

"Tunitas Creek Preserve is an excellent example of how working lands can contribute to the conservation goals of watershed and grassland habitat protection," Midpen General Manager Ana María Ruiz said. "Midpen is pleased to work with our nonprofit partner POST to preserve this magnificent coastal landscape as public open space, and protect its coastal grasslands and watersheds, wildlife and local agriculture for generations to come."

The Coastside is still largely rural with a rich agricultural heritage that Midpen's unique coastal mission pledges to sustain. Midpen's community-supported Vision Plan identifies protecting and supporting the San Mateo County coast's viable working lands as a top priority for the public agency.

According to Midpen Rangeland Ecologist Lewis Reed, Gordon Ridge has healthy stands of native coastal grassland plant communities that include foothill needle grass, California oatgrass, blue wildrye, California brome and California meadow barley. This habitat supports grassland-dependent native wildlife such as American badgers, savannah sparrows and Say's phoebes.

San Gregorio Creek winds along the property's southern border, hosting some of San Mateo County's last-known spawning grounds for endangered coho salmon and threatened steelhead trout. Midpen has completed several restoration projects upstream in the watershed to help these fish survive, and this purchase will provide opportunities to build on that work.

Much of Gordon Ridge has been continuously grazed with cattle for more than a century, and the property includes a large dairy barn built around 1870. Currently, fifth-generation Coastside rancher Tom Pacheco grazes cattle at Gordon Ridge with the help of his daughter, Rachel, and will continue this work as part of Midpen's conservation grazing program.

Midpen partners with small-scale local ranchers to utilize conservation grazing as a critical tool for responsibly managing more than 8,000 acres of coastal grasslands for ecological health, biodiversity and wildland fire safety. Coastal grasslands are one of North America's most biodiverse ecosystems and can benefit from periodic disturbances, historically provided by grazing wildlife herds and Native American burning practices, to prevent encroachment from shrubs, forest and invasive grasses.

Gordon Ridge also includes just under an acre leased to Blue House Farm as part of an adjacent 60-acre certified organic farm growing vegetables, fruits and cut flowers. Their products are sold at local farmers' markets and farm stands, and through wholesale accounts. Tunitas Creek Preserve currently has no public access due to its isolation and lack of infrastructure; however, this purchase will make future access opportunities more feasible. The Ohlone-Portola Heritage Trail, currently being planned by a regional committee of public land managers, may one day pass through this preserve.

###

*The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's mission is to acquire and preserve a regional greenbelt of open space land of regional significance in perpetuity, protect and restore the natural environment and provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education. On the San Mateo County coast, our mission also includes preserving agricultural land of regional significance and rural character and encouraging viable agricultural use of land resources. Midpen has successfully protected nearly 65,000 acres of public open space land in the Santa Cruz Mountains region since 1972.*

[openspace.org](http://openspace.org)