



VIEWS

QUARTERLY NEWS FROM THE MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT • WINTER 2025-26



The newly opened Lonely Forest Trail in La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve features towering redwoods. Other sections of the new trails traverse coastal grasslands and oak woodlands. (Frances Freyberg)

Celebrating Connections

New Trails Access the Heart of La Honda Creek Preserve

Midpen recently opened the Coho Vista, Western Meadowlark, Lone Madrone and Lonely Forest trails in La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve. These six miles of new multiuse-trails connect all existing trails in this vast preserve into one system totaling more than 17 miles and provide public access to this vast coastal preserve's central area, and to mountain bikers on designated trails, for the first time.

Sections of the newly opened trails were expertly designed and built by Midpen staff, in some areas through very challenging terrain. They have been crafted to provide not only an enjoyable visitor experience, but also to be protective of the natural environment and stand the test of time and the elements. Other parts of the trails incorporate existing ranch roads in this historic working landscape where cattle still graze in grassland areas as part of Midpen's Conservation Grazing Program.

These new trails provide a remote and challenging experience. To reach them, visitors must travel approximately one

mile on existing trails, and once on the new trails, traverse approximately 1,200 feet of elevation change. The effort required provides rewards in the form of opportunities for nature connection and views.

These new trails provide a remote and challenging experience. The effort required provides rewards in the form of opportunities for nature connection and coastal views.

On a clear day at a vista point near the northern end of the single-track Coho Vista Trail in La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve, visitors experience sweeping views of the Santa Cruz Mountains, coastal grasslands and Pacific Ocean. The Coho Vista Trail switchbacks through forests of redwood, Douglas fir, tan oak and oak with a mossy understory of sword ferns,

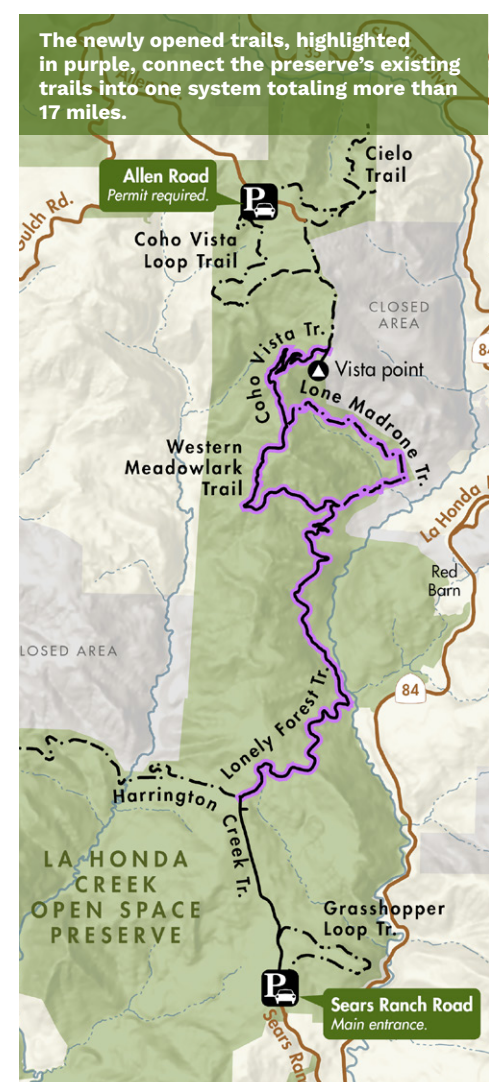
hazelnut, blackberry and fragrant hedge nettle.

Where the Coho Vista Trail meets up with the Lone Madrone and Western Meadowlark trails, which form a loop, visitors transition from the newly built single-track trail under the trees into open grasslands with road-width trails and more expansive views. The grasslands are a great area to look for some of the diverse plants and wildlife that thrive in coastal grassland habitats. Throughout the coming winter months, look for western bluebirds, meadowlarks and soaring raptors.

There is also a unique view of the Red Barn located within the La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve and until now, only viewed from Highway 84, showcasing this preserved landscape's agriculture history that continues today.

The Lonely Forest Trail includes single-track sections winding through pockets of shady oak and fragrant bay trees where dusky-footed woodrats build their stick nests in the understory; and also winds through tall, second-growth redwoods. Look for the stumps of the old-growth mother trees that were logged long ago, and listen for the calls of red-tailed hawks circling above.

Learn more and plan your visit at openspace.org/La-Honda-Creek.



The newly opened trails, highlighted in purple, connect the preserve's existing trails into one system totaling more than 17 miles.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE



Ferns, Frogs and Fish!

Rains bring lush greenery to the preserves, and Midpen projects support wildlife that live in creeks and ponds.



Good Fire in Sierra Azul

Midpen's Wildland Fire Resiliency Program work continues year-round, including pile burning this winter.



Peak Preservation

A new land purchase connects two of the highest peaks in the area for wildlife and future trails.

Winter Reflections



am grateful to have open space and nature nearby for moments of peace, contemplation and regeneration.

Over 50 years ago, Midpen was created by voters during a time of collective awakening, when a group of visionary people began a grassroots effort to ensure that “...the serene, unbuilt, unspoiled earth that awakens all our senses and makes us whole again” would be protected for generations to come.

Thanks to local voters, the Room to Breathe Initiative passed in 1972, creating Midpen as a locally funded, independent public agency. It is through the continued support of people like you that these essential natural lands are preserved, protected and restored; and of Midpen’s 27 preserves, 25 are publicly accessible, free and open to the public daily.

To date, Midpen has made significant progress on the community-supported projects in our Vision Plan. Through funding from voter-approved Measure AA, a 30-year, \$300 million general bond, more than 10,000 acres of open space have been added to our connected greenbelt. Nearly 400 of those acres were acquired in the last year alone supporting a future Mt. Umunhum-to-the-Sea regional trail and closing a critical gap for the planned Highway 17 trail crossing project.

Over the last year, we also opened new trails in Bear Creek Redwoods and La Honda Creek open space preserves. Significant strides were made in wildland fire resiliency with the removal of highly flammable, non-native eucalyptus trees in multiple locations, the expansion of fuel reduction efforts in Russian Ridge and Skyline Ridge open space preserves and nearly 25 acres of a community escape route treated along Skyline Boulevard.

Our wildlife work also had a productive year with the successful launch of a head-starting program for the endangered San Francisco garter snake aimed at bringing it back from the brink of extinction.

Through Midpen’s public programs, we shared in-person conversations at 50 community events, offered 300+ guided public activities, served over 400 students on field trips, provided interactive experiences to 2,000 community members at the Daniels Nature Center and tackled 135 volunteer projects to restore and maintain the land.

It is the people behind the work—you, the staff, volunteers and community—who make this progress possible.

These are just a few of the projects and activities we accomplished over the past year, and they are only part of the story. It is the people behind the work—you, the staff, volunteers and community—who make this progress possible. As we look toward the new year with wildflowers re-awakening and sunlight again filling our days, nature gifts us with a magnificent source of hope for positive change and renewal. We invite you to lose and then find yourselves in our preserves and on our trails as we start the new year.

[Learn more about at openspace.org/accomplishments.](#)

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](#).

Ana María Ruiz, General Manager
Leigh Ann Gessner, Open Space Views Editor
Katie Renz, Guided Activities Editor



Peak to Peak

New Acquisition Helps Fill-In the Greenbelt

Recently, Midpen approved the acquisition of a property that supports the critical connection between two of the highest peaks in the Santa Cruz Mountains: Mount Umunhum and Loma Prieta. This purchase not only preserves open space, it forges a connection for wildlife and future trails high above Silicon Valley.

“This land purchase opportunity helps us continue filling in gaps within the greenbelt,” said Midpen General Manager Ana Ruiz. “It is another step towards realizing the vision of an extended regional trail network while ensuring the long-term protection of diverse habitats between these two major peaks.”

Creek Complexity

Enhancing Waterways with Wood for Wildlife

In and along San Gregorio Creek, ten newly installed pieces of large wood settle in to perform their intended function — increasing habitat complexity in the creek and creating a healthier environment for native fish species. These installations mark the completion of a habitat enhancement effort in Midpen’s La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve, done in partnership with the San Mateo Resource Conservation District.

Across forested landscapes, wood has historically played a critical role in shaping the physical features and ecology of streams. Native fish across California’s forested watersheds have evolved in streams shaped by large wood from old growth forests. Many watersheds across Midpen lands, including San Gregorio, have less large wood available than in the past due to loss of old growth forests and in-stream wood removal.

Inspired by successful projects in the Pacific Northwest and elsewhere in central California, this large wood restoration project aims to increase habitat complexity in San Gregorio Creek for wildlife, including federally threatened steelhead trout and federally endangered coho salmon.



The wood installations may appear natural, but they’re highly engineered and strategically placed. Over time, wood structures create habitat within and alongside the creek, providing refuge for native fish species at every stage of their life cycle.

These new wood structures will help create deep pools where young fish live and hide across the seasons. They also sort sediment during high flows,

creating gravel bed streams that serve as spawning grounds for adult fish. Wood structures provide cover for fish from predators in the summer and from high flows in the winter and play host to aquatic insects that serve as a food source for many species, including California red-legged frogs.



The wood installations may appear natural, but they’re highly engineered and strategically placed.

The project, funded in part by Measure AA, builds upon similar work completed at the site nearly a decade ago. In 2016, Midpen installed 13 wood structures in San Gregorio Creek, in partnership with the San Mateo Resource Conservation District and California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Monitoring the site post-installation showed that the large wood created new habitat features in the creek and enhanced forage and refuge areas for native fish.

The effects of habitat enhancement efforts like these have the potential to support native fish recovery throughout the watershed. Much of the open space land that Midpen cares for and is actively working to restore is within the headwaters of important watersheds for steelhead trout and coho salmon. In the San Gregorio Creek watershed, Midpen’s stewardship actions positively impact the health of waterways from upstream tributaries within the Santa Cruz Mountains to downstream reaches that flow to the ocean.

[Learn more at openspace.org/creek.](#)

The property is located within Midpen’s largest preserve, Sierra Azul, and is surrounded by the preserve on three sides. San Jose Water Company property borders the property to the south.

With an elevation of 3,100 feet, this property offers panoramic views of Monterey Bay, the Pacific Ocean and Los Gatos Creek watershed. Its protection supports the health of local watersheds.

Ecologically, the land contains a diverse mix of chaparral, pine woodland, mature oak and mixed evergreen forest. Most significantly, it is part of an essential wildlife corridor, allowing species like mountain lions, bobcats, deer and foxes to move between the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Diablo and Gabilan ranges. This connectivity is vital for maintaining healthy genetic diversity across the region.

“Sierra Azul provides incredible, intact habitat for wide-ranging wildlife such as mountain lions,” added Ruiz. “Being able to protect large, expansive lands for wildlife and plants is critical, in an area where Midpen has successfully protected over 19,000 acres.”

The land also provides habitat for sensitive species, including the Santa Cruz kangaroo rat, a critically imperiled subspecies, and the western purple martin, which have been observed near the property. Once the acquisition is complete, Midpen will begin to restore the property by cleaning up and removing miscellaneous debris, abandoned vehicles, trailers and building materials.

This purchase not only preserves open space, it forges a connection for wildlife and future trails high above Silicon Valley.

This acquisition is a clear example of how Measure AA funds are being put to work to acquire and preserve open space, protect natural resources, and fulfill the community’s vision for a connected, healthy regional greenbelt.

[Learn more about Midpen's largest preserve on our website at openspace.org/Sierra-Azul.](#)



Pond Detectives

Surveying Reptiles and Amphibians Across Midpen

In several Midpen preserves, a small team of biologists and consultants have been scanning for the subtle signs of creatures that many visitors never notice. They aren’t tracking charismatic mountain lions or tuning in to the sounds of songbirds – they are listening for the soft rasp of a frog’s call, looking closely for a salamander’s smooth flank and edging around ponds to spot jelly-like amphibian egg masses.

This is Midpen’s first District-wide effort to document which reptiles and amphibians — or “herps” in biologist shorthand — live in and around the aquatic and semi-aquatic environments on Midpen lands, and to find out what that means for future restoration and planning. Herps are more than curiosities; they act as early warning indicators for habitat health.

It’s detective work and stewardship in one — learning who lives in our open spaces so we can better protect them and the ecosystems they depend on.

Amphibians in particular have permeable skin that absorbs both water and oxygen, making them especially sensitive to environmental changes — so when ponds dry up, habitats change or water quality declines, their populations often show the effects first, offering a window into the health of the entire ecosystem.

Over the past season, the team visited

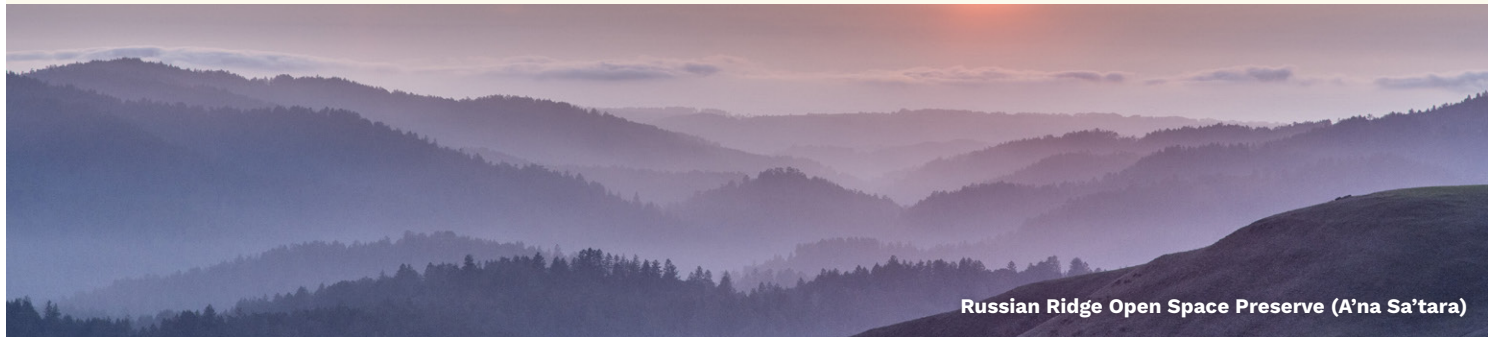
nine preserves, surveying about 30 ponds, 12 stream segments and one marsh. They’ll repeat the work next year so that the dataset captures seasonal and year-to-year variation and builds a fuller picture of the population. To maximize detections, the survey employs a full toolbox of approaches: daytime and nighttime visual searches, audio surveys and environmental DNA (eDNA) testing all play a role in seeking out hidden herps. Combining methods matters — sometimes an animal is seen but not picked up by eDNA, and other times the eDNA reveals a species that escaped visual detection.

Surveyors are focusing on several special-status and locally rare native species, including California red-legged frogs, California tiger salamanders, California giant salamanders, red-bellied newts, northwestern pond turtles, foothill yellow-legged frogs and San Francisco garter snakes.

The foothill yellow-legged frog is a particular priority: historical records and the presence of nearby populations suggest that Midpen’s Sierra Azul Preserve and adjacent areas could possibly still host some populations, and confirming its presence could prompt future management efforts to support this species.

The results from the survey, when completed in 2026, will inform regional conservation and restoration efforts and help refine where prescribed burns or trail projects can safely occur.

[Learn more about this project and the reptiles and amphibians it will support at openspace.org/herp-survey.](#)



Feeling Frond-ly?

Wintertime Nature Connection with Ferns

Spring presents a colorful wildflower palette. Summer allows for long sunlit days for exploration. Fall offers a change of leaves and remarkable shadows. And winter? The rainy season gives a green gateway into connecting with nature through ferns.

Like emerald-colored lace, these primitive plants soften the understory beneath the canopy of shrubs and trees, creating habitat while transforming the landscape into a fairy realm. Any fan of Return of the Jedi is familiar with ferns. Local hikers will be, too: Calflora, a database of the state’s wild plants, lists 44 species documented in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties.

Though delicate in form, paying close, intentional attention to these feathery plants opens a portal into the profound. As Santa Cruz-based writer Sarah Juniper Rabkin proposes, “Fern-gazing is a

glimpse into universal, elemental life processes that link human beings with every other organism on the planet.” Several species grow in nearly all Midpen preserves, providing fern-gazing opportunities galore.

Part of this human-fern connection is about survival. Their tender growth with the first rains is a symbolic sigh of relief after the six months of drought characterizing coastal California’s climate. The tightly furled new leaves, also called fronds, are called fiddleheads, named after the spiral shape of the top of violin and resembling a human baby’s tiny fist.

Ferns belong to an ancient lineage, greening up the earth about 200 million years before the dinosaurs dominated.

Ferns belong to an ancient lineage, greening up the earth about 200 million years before the dinosaurs dominated. On an evolutionary timeline, they arrived after the mosses, giving them a cutting edge with better developed roots, stems and leaves and a harder system for moving water from soil to atmosphere. Yet unlike cone-bearing trees or showy flowers with their diverse pollination tricks that evolved millions of years later, ferns lack seeds. Instead, they have microscopic spores dependent on water to disperse.

Flip over a frond: the dots lining the leaflets or visible along the edges are called sori, the structures in which the reproductive spores are made. Though



Finding Ferns

Where can ferns be found this winter? Good places to start include:

- The Wildcat Loop Trail in Rancho San Antonio Preserve for coastal woodfern (*Dryopteris arguta*), California maidenhair fern (*Adiantum jordanii*) and goldback fern (*Pentagramma triangularis*)
- El Corte de Madera Creek Preserve for western sword fern (*Polystichum munitum*) and giant chain fern (*Woodwardia fimbriata*)
- The Zinfandel Trail in Picchetti Ranch Preserve for coffee fern (*Pellaea andromedifolia*)

Search iNaturalist on each preserve’s homepage at [openspace.org](#) to see more fern hotspots. Happy fern-ing!

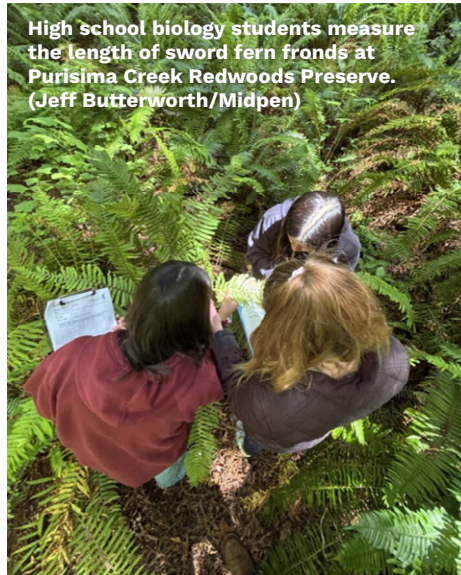
often mistaken for a plant disease, sori contain the ferns of the future.

Zooming back from the ancient past to the present challenge—human-caused climate change—part of this connection is happening through scientific study.

Since 2015, Midpen’s Interpretation and Education Department has teamed up with Save the Redwoods League and

local high school students to gather data to learn how different species in redwood forests, including ferns, respond to rising global temperatures. Their efforts combine community science and fern-gazing to discover answers about adaptation and survival for future generations.

[Learn more at openspace.org/ferns.](#)





Leticia Gonzales

Winter 2025-2026 Docent Naturalist Guided Activities

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 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 area. For accessibility inquiries, reach out to adacoordinator@openspace.org or by phone at (650) 691-1200 or by dialing the California Relay Service at 711.

December

Explorer Hike: Wintertime Traditions

Wednesday, December 3
10:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Long Ridge Preserve
4.5 miles [M](#) [L](#)

Ride the Redwoods

Saturday, December 6
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
El Corte de Madera Creek Preserve
9 miles [R](#) [A](#)

Secrets of the Oaks

Saturday, December 6
10:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Russian Ridge Preserve
5 miles [M](#) [L](#)

High Tide at Ravenswood

Saturday, December 6
11 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Ravenswood Preserve
0.5 mile [E](#) [W](#)

Going on a Grass Hunt

Sunday, December 7
9 a.m. – Noon
Cloverdale Ranch Preserve
Meet: Directions emailed
4 miles [R](#) [M](#)



Water Wonders

Sunday, December 7
2 – 5:30 p.m.
Picchetti Ranch Preserve
4.5 miles [M](#) [L](#)

Scenic Aerobic Hike

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

Connecting the Old & New

Wednesday, December 10
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Bear Creek Redwoods Preserve
4.5 miles [M](#)

Signs of Winter

Friday, December 12
9 a.m. – Noon
Pulgas Ridge Preserve
4.25 miles [M](#)

To the Top!

Friday, December 12
9:30 a.m. – 3 p.m.
Windy Hill Preserve
Meet: Lower Windy Hill Parking Area
8 miles [S](#) [L](#)

Sunrise Hike: Stillness, Strength, Renewal

Saturday, December 13
6:20 – 10:30 a.m.
Sierra Azul Preserve
Meet: Jacques Ridge Parking Area
5.25 miles [R](#) [M](#)

Banana Slug Counting

Saturday, December 13
9:30 a.m. – Noon
Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve
Meet: Purisima Creek Road Parking Area
2 miles [R](#) [E](#) [F](#) [L](#)

Wonders of Cherry Springs

Sunday, December 14
9:45 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.
Sierra Azul Preserve
Meet: Camden Park & Ride Lot
2.5 miles [R](#) [M](#) [L](#)

Sentinel in the Sky

Sunday, December 14
1 – 3 p.m.
Sierra Azul Preserve
Meet: Mount Umunhum Summit Parking Area
0.25 mile [M](#)

Fleas Navidad

Sunday, December 14
2 – 3:30 p.m.
Pulgas Ridge Preserve
2.5 miles [R](#) [E](#) [F](#) [D](#)

Ramble at Rancho

Monday, December 15
9 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Rancho San Antonio Preserve
Meet: Lot 6
7 miles [S](#) [L](#)

Merry Berries & Nuts

Tuesday, December 16
10 a.m. – Noon
Windy Hill Preserve
Meet: Lower Windy Hill Parking Area
2 miles [E](#)

Mindful Movement

Tuesday, December 16
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Skyline Ridge Preserve
2.5 miles [E](#) [L](#)

Seasonal Shift

Wednesday, December 17
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
Long Ridge Preserve
4.5 miles [M](#) [L](#)

Explorer Hike: Winter in Rancho

Wednesday, December 17
10:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Rancho San Antonio Preserve
Meet: Lot 1
4.25 miles [S](#) [L](#)

Escape the Holiday Madness!

Saturday, December 20
10 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.
Picchetti Ranch Preserve
4.5 miles [M](#) [L](#)

In Search of Manzanitas

Sunday, December 21
9 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
St. Joseph’s Hill Preserve
4.5 miles [M](#)

A Road Less Traveled

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

Boxing Day in Nature

Friday, December 26
10 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Monte Bello Preserve
3.5 miles [M](#)

January

Experience the King Tides

Friday, January 2
10 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Ravenswood Preserve
3 miles [E](#) [W](#)

In Search of Manzanitas

Sunday, January 4
9 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
El Corte de Madera Creek Preserve
Meet: Skeggs Point Parking Area
4.5 miles [M](#)

Faults, Fungi & Flora

Sunday, January 4
9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Windy Hill Preserve
Meet: Willowbrook-Alpine Roadside Parking
3 miles [F](#) [E](#)

Explorer Hike: New Year’s Resolution

Wednesday, January 7
10:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
El Corte de Madera Creek Preserve
Meet: Skeggs Point Parking Area
5 miles [S](#) [L](#)

Going on a Grass Hunt

Friday, January 9
9 a.m. – Noon
La Honda Creek Preserve
3.5 miles [M](#)

Redwoods & Logging

Saturday, January 10
8:30 a.m. – Noon
Bear Creek Redwoods Preserve
4 miles [S](#)

What Are the Newts Up To?

Saturday, January 10
9 a.m. – Noon
Picchetti Ranch Preserve
2 miles [E](#) [F](#) [L](#)

Ride the Redwoods

Saturday, January 10
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
El Corte de Madera Creek Preserve
9 miles [R](#) [A](#)

Sentinel in the Sky

Sunday, January 11
1 – 3 p.m.
Sierra Azul Preserve
Meet: Mount Umunhum Summit Parking Area
0.25 mile [M](#)

Wild Card Ramble at Rancho

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

Winter Trails from Lake to Pond
Tuesday, January 13
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
Skyline Ridge Preserve
Meet: Skyline Ridge Equestrian Parking Area
4.5 miles [M](#) [L](#)

Scenic Aerobic Hike
Wednesday, January 14
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Long Ridge Preserve
5 miles [S](#)

Spores & More
Friday, January 16
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.
El Corte de Madera Creek Preserve
Meet: Skeggs Point Parking Area
5.5 miles [S](#) [L](#)

History on Two Wheels
Saturday, January 17
9:15 a.m. – Noon
Fremont Older Preserve
10 miles [R](#) [L](#) [B](#)

A Walk in the Garden
Saturday, January 17
1 – 4 p.m.
Windy Hill Preserve
Meet: Upper Spring Ridge Roadside Parking
2.5 miles [M](#)

Aerobic Views
Tuesday, January 20
8:45 – 11:30 a.m.
Rancho San Antonio Preserve
Meet: Lot 6
6 miles [S](#) [L](#)



Mindful Movement
Tuesday, January 20
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Skyline Ridge Preserve
2.5 miles [E](#) [L](#)

Explorer Hike: Winter Waterfowl
Wednesday, January 21
10:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Stevens Creek Shoreline Nature Area
4 miles [E](#) [L](#)

Summiting in Search of Manzanitas
Friday, January 23
9 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Sierra Azul Preserve
Meet: Bald Mountain Parking Area
8.5 miles [S](#) [L](#)

Fungal Fun
Saturday, January 24
9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve
7 miles [R](#) [S](#) [L](#)

Whooo’s That? Owls of the Redwoods
Saturday, January 24
4:45 – 7:30 p.m.
Bear Creek Redwoods Preserve
2 miles [R](#) [E](#)

Wonders Abound
Sunday, January 25
9:25 a.m. – 1:45 p.m.
Sierra Azul Preserve
Meet: Camden Park & Ride Lot
3.5 miles [R](#) [S](#) [L](#)



Family Nature Journaling
Sunday, January 25
10 – 11:30 a.m.
Skyline Ridge Preserve
Meet: Russian Ridge Parking Area
0.75 mile [R](#) [E](#) [F](#)

Chaparral Adventure
Monday, January 26
9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
St. Joseph’s Hill Preserve
4 miles [S](#)

Banana Slugs, Wildflowers & More
Tuesday, January 27
10 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.
El Corte de Madera Creek Preserve
Meet: Skeggs Point Parking Area
4 miles [M](#) [L](#)

Trail Trek Thursday
Thursday, January 29
9 a.m. – 2 p.m.
Long Ridge Preserve
Meet: Hickory Oaks Roadside Parking
7.5 miles [S](#) [L](#)

February
Wonders of Cherry Springs
Sunday, February 1
9:25 a.m. – 1:15 p.m.
Sierra Azul Preserve
Meet: Camden Park & Ride Lot
2.5 miles [R](#) [M](#) [L](#)

Earthquake Walk
Sunday, February 1
1 – 3:30 p.m.
Los Trancos Preserve
2 miles [E](#) [F](#)

Wild Card Ramble at Rancho
Monday, February 2
9 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Rancho San Antonio Preserve
Meet: Lot 6
7 miles [S](#) [L](#)

Families Exploring the Five Senses
Tuesday, February 3
9 – 11 a.m.
Rancho San Antonio Preserve
Meet: Lot 6
2 miles [R](#) [E](#) [F](#)

Ecology in the Ecotones
Wednesday, February 4
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Monte Bello Preserve
3 miles [M](#)

Explorer Hike: Four Public Lands Loop
Wednesday, February 4
10:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Saratoga Gap Preserve
5 miles [M](#) [L](#)

Wandering the Hawthorns Area
Friday, February 6
10 a.m. – Noon
Windy Hill Preserve
Meet: Directions emailed
2 miles [R](#) [M](#)

The Very Hungry Caterpillars
Saturday, February 7
9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Skyline Ridge Preserve
Meet: Russian Ridge Parking Area
2 miles [E](#) [F](#) [L](#)

Ride the Redwoods
Saturday, February 7
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
El Corte de Madera Creek Preserve
9 miles [R](#) [A](#)

Fungal Fun
Sunday, February 8
9 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve
5.5 miles [R](#) [S](#) [L](#)

Winter Qigong & the Water Element
Tuesday, February 10
12:30 – 3:30 p.m.
Windy Hill Preserve
Meet: Lower Windy Hill Parking Area
2.5 miles [M](#)

Scenic Aerobic Hike
Wednesday, February 11
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Bear Creek Redwoods Preserve
5 miles [S](#)

Loving the Land
Saturday, February 14
9 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Windy Hill Preserve
Meet: Directions emailed
1 mile [R](#) [E](#) [L](#)

Weird Valentine
Saturday, February 14
10 a.m. – 4 p.m.
Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve
Meet: Purisima Creek Road Parking Area
4 miles [R](#) [M](#) [L](#)

Sentinel in the Sky
Sunday, February 15
1 – 3 p.m.
Sierra Azul Preserve
Meet: Mount Umunhum Summit Parking Area
0.25 mile [M](#)

Year of the Horse
Tuesday, February 17
9 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Russian Ridge Preserve
Meet: Mindego Gateway Parking Area
5 miles [S](#) [L](#)

Mindful Movement
Tuesday, February 17
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Skyline Ridge Preserve
2.5 miles [E](#) [L](#)

Signs of Early Spring
Wednesday, February 18
9 a.m. – Noon
Pulgas Ridge Preserve
4 miles [M](#)

Explorer Hike: The Workings of a Watershed
Wednesday, February 18
10:30 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Picchetti Ranch Preserve
4.5 miles [M](#) [L](#)

Get the Buzz on Manzanitas
Thursday, February 19
9:30 a.m. – Noon
Pulgas Ridge Preserve
3 miles [M](#)

Winter Blooms
Friday, February 20
10 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Coal Creek Preserve
Meet: Monte Bello Parking Area
5 miles [M](#)

Going on a Grass Hunt
Saturday, February 21
9 a.m. – Noon
Tunitas Creek Preserve
Meet: Directions emailed
3 miles [R](#) [M](#)

Scenic Skyline Sampler
Saturday, February 21
9 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Skyline Ridge Preserve
7.75 miles [S](#) [L](#)

Plants of Alpine Pond
Saturday, February 21
1 – 4 p.m.
Skyline Ridge Preserve
Meet: Russian Ridge Parking Area
1 mile [E](#)

Winter Fungal Walk
Sunday, February 22
9 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Long Ridge Preserve
5 miles [R](#) [M](#) [L](#)



Infinite Wonders
Sunday, February 22
9:20 a.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Sierra Azul Preserve
Meet: Camden Park & Ride Lot
4.5 miles [R](#) [S](#) [L](#)

In Search of Western Leatherwood
Monday, February 23
9 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Rancho San Antonio Preserve
Meet: Lot 6
5 miles [S](#)

Morning Meander: Woodlands to Heritage Grove
Wednesday, February 25
10 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Russian Ridge Preserve
Meet: Mindego Gateway Parking Area
2 miles [E](#)

Wild Blossoms, Local History
Wednesday, February 25
1 – 4 p.m.
Pulgas Ridge Preserve
3 miles [M](#)

Trail Trek Thursday
Thursday, February 26
9:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Sierra Azul Preserve
Meet: Limekiln Trailhead
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.
- [A](#) **Advanced Mountain Bike Ride:** Intended for participants with dirt single-track riding experience; competent at climbing and descending steep and rough trails. Moderate to fast pace, 10+ mile ride on a wide variety of trail conditions. For experienced riders with a high level of physical fitness and excellent endurance.
- [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.
- [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.
- [W](#) **Wheelchair Accessible**
- [R](#) **Online Reservations Required:** 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.



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Sign up to receive Midpen's
print or electronic newsletters,
and email updates on preserves
and projects.

openspace.org/opt-in

Follow us on social media:



Rich Jarvis Mindego

SAVE THE DATE!

Careers in Conservation Job Fair

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District is hosting
our first-ever career fair dedicated to conservation in the
Bay Area. Join us and several conservation partners and
employers to learn more about green career resources:

Friday, March 6, 2026 from 2-6 p.m.

**Los Altos Community Center
97 Hillview Ave., Los Altos**

Look for more information at openspace.org/career-fair.



Santa Clara County Fire's
Vasona Crew and Midpen
staff partnered on
pile-burning in Sierra Azul
Preserve in November and
December of 2025. (Santa
Clara County Fire)

Good Fire in Sierra Azul

A Multi-Benefit Approach to Wildland Fire Resilience

While we may be heading into winter, wildfire resilience work doesn't stop. Midpen, in partnership with Santa Clara County Fire, is conducting pile-burn operations through December 2025 in a closed area of Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve. Pile burning disposes of accumulated brush and woody debris.

With this project, we are specifically targeting smaller vegetation and low branches known as ladder fuels within an oak woodland area to prepare it for a potential prescribed fire in subsequent years and bolster the land's resilience to potential unplanned wildfires. Pile burning offers several ecological advantages, including

returning essential nutrients to the soil and stimulating the germination of native plant species that depend on fire to germinate, supporting the natural biodiversity.

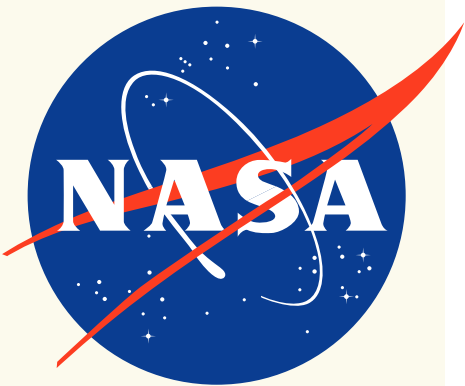
The piles were built on the tail-end of the fire season with help from members of the San Jose Conservation Corps and Charter School. The Corps provides job training and exposure to careers in conservation for young adults.

“By partnering with the Corps, Midpen hopes to help open doors to potential careers in conservation and fire management. I started my career as a corpsmember with the California Conservation Corps, so I know how valuable these experiences can be.”

**—Midpen Field Resource Specialist
Chelsea Young**

“In alignment with our ecologically sensitive vegetation management practices, we are not removing any vegetation that will change the composition of the oak woodland habitat,” explained Chelsea Young, Midpen Field Resource Specialist and the project manager. “It's important for us to ensure the integrity of the ecosystem remains intact.”

**Learn more about Midpen's
Wildland Fire Resiliency Program
at openspace.org/fire.**



Enhancing Fire Modeling with NASA

The pile burning in Sierra Azul Preserve includes a unique collaboration with fire scientists at the NASA Ames Research Center in Mountain View.

NASA has recently developed a specialized map using satellite imagery to predict which vegetation types are more likely to generate and spread burning embers, also called firebrands, in high winds.

Midpen's pile burns will offer a real-world opportunity to collect data about the temperature and the density of embers created by different vegetation types.

This ember data will be used to validate and refine NASA's modeling, generate detailed maps of potential vegetation ember sources across California's wildlands and improve regional wildfire risk assessment.