

# Portfolio 20

## South Bay Foothills Wildlife Passage and Ridge Trail Improvements



St. Joseph's Hill Open Space Preserve (R. Goldthwaite)

### DESCRIPTION

- Establish safe corridors for mountain lions across Highway 17.
- Establish Bay Area Ridge Trail crossing.

Portfolio Allocation: \$13,966,000

Portfolio Expenditures Through 6/30/2023: \$713,150

### NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

#### MAA20-001 Wildlife Corridor: Highway 17 Crossing

##### Fiscal Year 2023

- Completed the environmental technical reports and administrative draft environmental document.
- Executed a cooperative agreement with Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) for VTA to be the project delivery partner and lead the permitting and design work beginning in FY24.
- Conducted stakeholder and partner meetings and held two public community meetings (one in-person and one virtual) to provide a status update and receive input on the project.

#### MAA20-002 Bay Area Ridge Trail: Highway 17 Crossing

##### Fiscal Year 2023

- Completed the environmental technical reports and administrative draft environmental document.
- Executed a cooperative agreement with VTA for VTA to be the project delivery partner and lead the permitting and design work beginning in FY24.
- Secured grant funding for the El Sereno loop trail connection.
- Conducted stakeholder and partner meetings and held two public community meetings (one in-person and one virtual) to provide a status update and receive input on the project.

##### Prior Years

- Completed technical field studies and environmental field surveys to inform the preparation of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) environmental documents.
- Completed the accessibility requirements report to satisfy a Caltrans requirement.
- Secured additional grant funding, including \$50,000 from a private fund, \$1 million from the Moore Foundation and \$2 million from California Department of Parks and Recreation; submitted request for appropriation of \$400,000 in federal funds for trail connections in April 2022. As of June 2022, project fully funded through design phase.

Identified trail alignments to connect adjacent open space preserves on the east and west side of proposed crossings and to connect El Sereno Preserve to Sanborn County Park.

Successfully coordinated with the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) and Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) on the addition of the Highway 17 Project to the Regional Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) and MTC's federal funding for the project, which MTC approved on March 23, 2022. MTC's funding through an exchange agreement with Midpen allows VTA to be a project partner with Caltrans and provides a federal nexus for Caltrans to facilitate the concurrent completion of CEQA and NEPA review to streamline environmental review and permitting and meet the targeted 2025/2026 construction timeline.

Hosted monthly meetings with Caltrans, completed cultural and biological field studies for the full project and engineering and geotechnical studies within the Caltrans right-of-way (ROW).

Developed Mitigation Credit Agreement strategy, secured Wildlife Conservation Board grant funding (\$5.0 million), invited to submit \$1.0 million proposal for Moore Foundation grant funding and a \$50,000 proposal for Windward Fund grant funding and supported Senator Cortese's \$2.0 million member request that was approved in the FY22 state budget.

Completed the request for qualifications and proposals process and contracted with AECOM for environmental review services for compliance with CEQA and NEPA.

Caltrans reviewed the final project study report developed by Midpen and consultants.

Consultant selected and under contract for CEQA/NEPA and Caltrans project approval and environmental documentation.

Submitted draft project study report to Caltrans and received initial comments. Held additional meetings with project partners and stakeholders (Caltrans, SJWC, Green Foothills, National Wildlife Federation), as well as a second public meeting to continue to advance a proposed wildlife crossing.

Conducted preplanning, trail scouting and preliminary conceptual-level design and cost estimates for a proposed regional trail crossing over Highway 17. Completed a pre-permitting coordination meeting with Caltrans.

In coordination with a consultant team, completed a draft project preliminary alternatives report for both the wildlife corridor and regional trails crossing at Highway 17 for agency review.

Engaged public and stakeholders for input on proposed draft alternatives and received agency comments on draft report.

Developed a cooperative agreement with Caltrans and developed a Caltrans project initiation document.

Continued evaluation of the Highway 17 wildlife crossing and regional trail crossing through identification and analysis of additional crossing alternatives in response to partner, stakeholder and public comment on initial drafts.

Collaborated with partner agencies (Santa Clara County Parks, Valley Water, Ridge Trail, etc.) to identify best opportunities for a public access crossing at Highway 17, including trail connections. Crossing will close a major gap in the regionwide trail system and connect open space areas for multiple regional trails.

## In Support of MAA20

### Prior Years

Signed a letter of understanding with SJWC on Dec. 23, 2019, for collaboration on watershed open space lands, including cooperation on Wildlife and Ridge Trail crossing of Highway 17.

Completed preplanning and site investigations to identify potential trail routes to connect trail crossings. Worked with consultants to develop preliminary trail design and completed draft trail connections report. Shared draft report with stakeholders (Caltrans, SJWC, Santa Clara County Parks, etc.) for review prior to public presentations. Scheduled public informational meeting on trail connections.

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Conducted numerous field investigations and trail route evaluations for a potential future regional trail crossing over Highway 17 that would become part of the Bay Area Ridge Trail near the El Sereno, St. Joseph's Hill and Bear Creek Redwoods preserves.

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Co-hosted with POST a free screening of "The Cat that Saved America" and panel discussion on wildlife corridors and the Highway 17 wildlife crossing attended by 325 guests on April 7, 2018.

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Conducted additional ground-truthing and analysis on potential trail alignments that support the potential trail crossing locations to include in a feasibility study. Identified eight trail alignments to include in the project study report for Caltrans.

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## **PROJECT CHALLENGES**

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Complex Caltrans process and coordination with numerous project partners and stakeholders and Midpen as the project proponent despite not owning or managing any of the underlying land or immediate trail connections.

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Consideration of more than one wildlife and multi-use trail crossing alternative requires more extensive NEPA documentation.

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Additional federal funding, beyond the exchange of Midpen local funds for MTC federal funds, is not guaranteed in a competitive environment; Midpen nonetheless intends to submit requests for state and federal opportunities, working with legislators and partner agencies.

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Requires negotiations with multiple property owners to secure property rights.

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## **POTENTIAL NEXT STEPS**

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Complete CEQA/NEPA document concurrently for the entire project, including crossings and trails.

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Complete Caltrans project approval and environmental document phase.

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Continue to secure permission to access private properties to negotiate for property rights.

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Work with partners to secure federal funding and target grants to fund project construction phase.

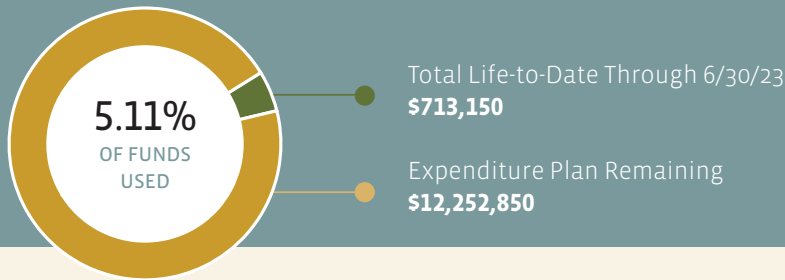
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Work with VTA on initiating the plans, specifications and estimates phase.

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**Portfolio 20: South Bay Foothills—Wildlife Passage and Ridge Trail Improvements**

| Project  | Expenditure Plan    | Total Through Prior Period 6/30/22 | Current Period 7/1/22 Through 6/30/23 | Total Life-to-Date Through 6/30/23 | Expenditure Plan Remaining | Percent Expended |
|--|---------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------|
| Total Portfolio Allocation                                 | \$13,966,000        |                                    |                                       |                                    |                            |                  |
| 20-001—Wildlife Corridor: Highway 17 Crossing              |                     | \$780,237                          | \$277,326                             | \$1,057,563                        |                            |                  |
| 20-002—Bay Area Ridge Trail: Highway 17 Crossing           |                     | \$976,145                          | \$550,930                             | \$1,527,075                        |                            |                  |
| <b>Subtotal</b>  | <b>\$13,966,000</b> | <b>\$1,756,382</b>                 | <b>\$828,256</b>                      | <b>\$2,584,638</b>                 | <b>\$11,381,362</b>        | <b>18.51%</b>    |
| 20-001 Wildlife Corridor: Highway 17 Crossing Grant Income |                     | (\$1,280,497)                      | (\$590,991)                           | (\$1,871,488)                      |                            |                  |
| <b>Grand Total</b>   | <b>\$13,966,000</b> | <b>\$475,885</b>                   | <b>\$237,265</b>                      | <b>\$713,150</b>                   | <b>\$13,252,850</b>        | <b>5.11%</b>     |



St. Joseph's Hill Open Space Preserve (Midpen)