



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

PLANNING AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE

R-15-64
April 14, 2015

AGENDA ITEM 3

AGENDA ITEM

Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve Plan and related planning coordination

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Review the status and next steps of the comprehensive planning process for the Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve (Preserve) and provide feedback.
2. Review and confirm the proposed approach of completing a combined Environmental Impact Report to include the following Preserve-wide planning projects: Preserve Plan, Bear Creek Stables Site Plan and Alma College Rehabilitation Plan.

SUMMARY

The Bear Creek Redwoods Preserve Plan will facilitate implementation of Measure AA Project #21-4, access improvements to open the Preserve to public use. The Preserve Plan is on an accelerated timeline and is planned to be completed with Board approvals received in winter 2015. As such, the planning process to complete the Preserve Plan is streamlined, and the General Manager recommends relying largely on existing data and input that was gathered during the Sierra Azul/Bear Creek Redwoods Master Plan process. In addition, the General Manager also recommends analyzing the three active Preserve planning projects (the Preserve Plan, the Bear Creek Stables Site Plan, and the Alma College Site Rehabilitation Plan) concurrently in one Environmental Impact Report. This approach will allow for a comprehensive impact analysis, reduce overall consultant costs, and provide process and review efficiencies. The recommendations would result in a potential cost savings to Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (the District).

BACKGROUND

Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve was established in 1999 with the acquisition of two large properties. These properties were previously owned by Hong Kong Metro Realty Company and had been the subject of planned residential and golf course development. Shortly after the purchase, the District entered into a month-to-month rental agreement with the existing tenant of the horse boarding facility, and perimeter fencing was installed around the former Alma College property. Big Creek Lumber owned prior timber harvest rights to portions of the Preserve, and selective harvesting was carried out in 1999 and 2000. In 2000, a permit system was established for stable riders and the public for hiking and equestrian use of approximately 10 miles of historic logging and access roads on the eastern side of the Preserve. An existing, 10-vehicle parking lot was designated to serve permit holders. Due to the lack of additional parking and the absence of an established pedestrian crossing at Bear Creek Road, the western portion of the Preserve, and its additional 8 – 10 miles of historic roads, have remained closed. Purchase

of the former Holmes Lumber Company property in 2010 brought the Preserve to its current size of 1,432 acres and closed the gap between the Preserve's eastern and western sides at Summit Road.

DISCUSSION

Previous Planning Efforts

The close proximity of the Preserve to major South Bay cities and its continuous, wooded trail system provides high recreational value, and the Preserve is expected to receive heavy visitor use once open to the public. Planning studies to guide future public access and stewardship actions were initiated shortly after Preserve acquisition and culminated in the preparation of a draft Sierra Azul/Bear Creek Redwoods Master Plan and EIR (draft Master Plan) in 2009. As part of the development of the draft Master Plan, a series of stakeholder interviews and public workshops were conducted under the guidance of an Ad Hoc Committee of the Board.

The Draft Master Plan proposes a Preferred Alternative that prioritizes resource management while expanding public access opportunities. Proposed actions include several new parking lots, a formalized pedestrian crossing at Bear Creek Road to allow access to the west side, and new trails to improve internal Preserve circulation and provide regional connections for hikers and equestrians. Mountain bicycling and dog use were not proposed. High-priority stewardship actions were also identified, including a long-term lease and improvements to Bear Creek Stables, potential rehabilitation/reuse of the Alma College site, road and trail improvements and closures to protect water quality, and an invasive species management plan. The Preserve is also identified as a potential future site of a south-area field office. Given shifting priorities as of 2009 that resulted in the deferral of the Master Plan, individual planning efforts for the Preserve did continue including, additional analysis for the Alma College site and Bear Creek Stables, completion of a Road and Trail Inventory, and implementation of an intensive invasive species control program.

Current Planning Efforts and Preserve Planning Update

Bear Creek Stables -- The Bear Creek Stables Site Plan Project is identifying a series of management actions for the site to meet the District's resource management goals, and planning for the development of public access facilities and programs, as well as improvements to the Stables infrastructure.

Alma College -- During the public input phase of the Draft Master Plan, strong support emerged for retaining visual landmarks at the Alma College site. The Alma College Conditions Assessment Project was completed in 2010 and clarified the historical significance of individual structures and the site as a whole. The conditions assessment report identified the opportunity to develop the site as a cultural landscape, a type of Historic District that is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The Alma College site is currently listed as a Historic District on the Santa Clara County Heritage Resources Inventory. Due to its prominent location at one of the Preserve's major access points, the disposition of the Alma College site should be determined concurrently with public access planning. A consultant contract to develop the Alma College Site Rehabilitation Plan will be brought to the Board on April 22, 2015.

Public Access Trails and Staging -- The Draft Master Plan identified potential parking areas at several locations along Bear Creek Road, including potential sites near Highway 17, the Alma College site (Gate BC04), and the Summit Road area (see Exhibit A). Potential pedestrian crossing locations were identified at three locations: Alma College site, Presentation Center, and Summit Road. In December 2014, Hexagon Traffic Consultants, Inc., was retained to analyze the feasibility of these parking lot driveway and crossing locations from a safety (line-of-sight) standpoint, and to perform traffic counts and an evaluation of typical traffic speeds. The study identified three safe driveway locations and one safe pedestrian crossing location at the Alma College site. Early consultation with the Santa Clara County Roads and Airports Department indicated that these locations would be acceptable under County standards.

A series of old roads throughout the Preserve form an interconnecting network that passes through grasslands, oak woodlands, and conifer forests, and along steep canyons with perennial creeks. Existing roads on the eastern side of the Preserve receive moderate use by Bear Creek Stables riders and very light use by permit holders. During the development of the Draft Master Plan, strong public sentiment emerged both in support of, and in opposition to, opening the trails to multi-use (including bicycles). Due to concerns regarding potential conflicts with horses, bicycle use was not included as a proposed trail use in the Draft Master Plan.

Since that time, the Open Space Vision Plan and the passage of Measure AA brought significant focus to increased public access, including multi-use of Preserve trails. To balance the District's provision of multi-use trails in the South Bay preserves, the General Manager recommends conducting an evaluation of a regional multi-use trail connection through the Preserve as part of this planning process. Significant new factors that merit a second look at a multi-use regional trail connection include the addition of the Holmes property, which links the east side of the Preserve to Summit Road, and the Measure AA funding that is available for developing a Bay Area Ridge Trail crossing over Highway 17. Staff recently began scouting an alignment along the perimeter of the Preserve that may allow a potential multi-use trail connection and avoid the majority of the Preserve's internal road network.

Resource Management/Operations -- The *Bear Creek Redwoods Road and Trail Inventory* (Best, 2010) identifies a number of high priority stewardship actions to reduce erosion and protect water quality, including the abandonment of several roads. The inventory also notes a potentially unstable dam that requires further analysis. The report also raised concerns over existing bridges, which have since been examined and load-tested, and found to be structurally sound.

Next Steps

In February, the Landscape Architecture firm Populous, Inc., was retained to complete design alternatives for the Bear Creek Stables Site Plan, as well as the comprehensive planning and environmental review for the Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve Plan (see report R-15-25). The Preserve Plan will follow the vision and goals developed during the earlier Master Plan process, and will generally include components of the Preferred Alternative proposed by the Draft Master Plan. However, the Preserve Plan will be updated and provide a greater level of detail for certain actions of the Preferred Alternative based on new, additional information, new property acquisition, and new potential regional trail connections as described above. The Preserve Plan is expected to be brought to the Board for approval in winter 2015, with groundbreaking for new public access facilities to begin in summer or fall 2016.

Public Input Process -- The Sierra Azul/Bear Creek Redwoods Master Plan Process included three stakeholder meetings and two public workshops, as well as over 10 meetings of the Sierra Azul/Bear Creek Redwoods Master Plan Ad Hoc Committee. In order to expedite the opening of the Preserve to the public, the General Manager recommends fully utilizing the data and input previously gathered during the Sierra Azul/Bear Creek Redwoods Master Plan process to finalize the Preserve Plan. In addition to this, there will be ample upcoming opportunities for Committee, Board, and public input prior to completion of the Preserve Plan, according to the tentative schedule shown below.

Tentative Schedule for Public Input

Forum	Purpose of Meeting	Date
PNR Committee meeting	BCR planning update and Preserve Plan schedule	April 14, 2015
Neighborhood meeting	BCR planning update and Preserve Plan schedule	April 29, 2015
PNR Committee meeting	Debrief of public input gathered and review of preliminary Preserve Plan project description	June 2, 2015

Board Study Session	Review preliminary Preserve Plan project description	June 10, 2015
Board regular meeting & CEQA Scoping meeting	Consider approval of the BCR Preserve Plan as the CEQA project description to initiate the EIR process	June 17, 2015
Environmental Impact Report (EIR) circulation	Circulation of Draft EIR/ Public comment period	Fall 2015
Board regular meeting	Consider EIR certification and Project approval	December 2015

Comprehensive Environmental Impact Analysis -- The Preserve Plan will be a comprehensive planning document that incorporates findings from both the Bear Creek Stables Site Plan Project and the Alma College Site Rehabilitation Plan Project. This comprehensive approach enables site planning alternatives for both the stables and Alma College site to be concurrently analyzed within the context of the larger, preserve-wide public access planning and as part of the environmental review.

The planning process for opening Bear Creek Redwoods to the public on an expedited schedule was presented to the Action Plan and Budget Committee during the FY2015-16 budget review process. At that time, it was expected that the Bear Creek Stables and Alma College projects would be developed separately from the Preserve Plan and require separate CEQA documentation. To expedite the environmental review of both the Alma College Site Rehabilitation and Bear Creek Stables Site Plans, the CEQA analysis will include a review of potential alternatives rather than focus on only one preferred alternative. This approach will provide the Board with additional time to make decisions on a final set of recommendations following the CEQA process. Given this approach, it is now possible to consolidate the environmental review for the Preserve Plan, Bear Creek Stables Site Plan, and Alma College Site Rehabilitation Plan into one Environmental Impact Report, thus allowing any potential environmental impacts to be examined comprehensively, saving significant staff time and consultant costs, and facilitating a more rapid project implementation upon Board approval.

FISCAL IMPACT

The Planning Department's FY2015-16 Budget includes \$273,000 for completion of the Bear Creek Redwoods Preserve Plan and CEQA analysis. The proposed recommendations as set out in this report may result in potential cost savings to the project budget.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

CEQA analysis would begin after the full Board of Directors approves the Preserve Plan Project Description, which is scheduled for June 2015.

NEXT STEPS

With Committee concurrence, the General Manager will direct staff to proceed with project planning according to the schedule provided above.

Attachment

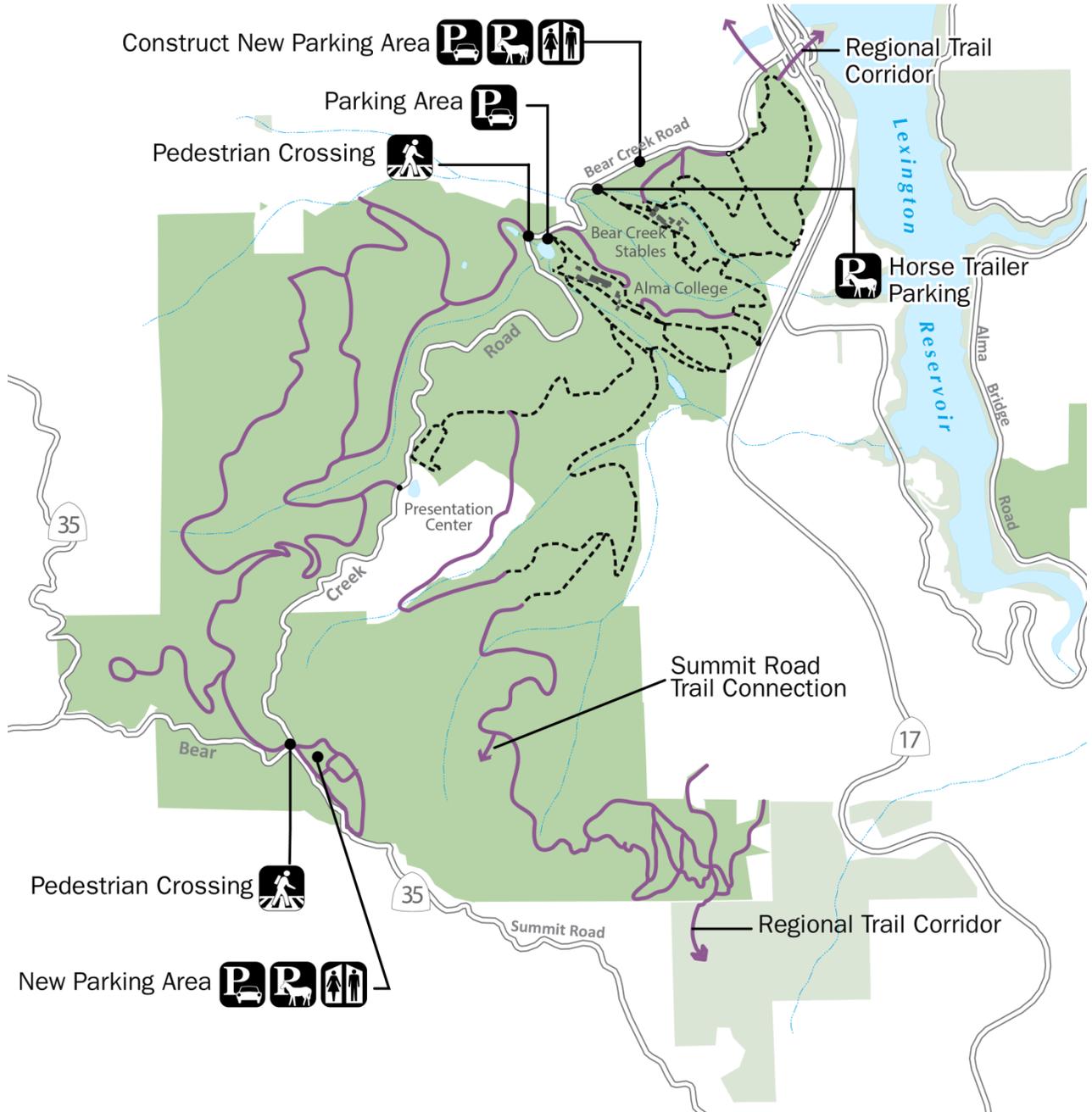
- A. Bear Creek Redwoods Potential Public Access Improvements

Responsible Department Head:
Jane Mark, AICP, Planning Manager

Prepared by:
Lisa Bankosh, Planner III

Attachment 1. Potential Public Access Improvements at Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve

BEAR CREEK REDWOODS PRESERVE PLAN



POTENTIAL PUBLIC ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS

- Potential Trail
- Patrol Road (Currently Open to Trail Use by Permit Only)
- Midpen Preserve
- Other Public Lands

Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District
(MROSD)
March, 2015

