



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

R-17-76
Meeting 17-15
June 28, 2017

AGENDA ITEM 15

AGENDA ITEM

Amendment to the La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve Master Plan to include One Proposed New Trail Loop and New Trail Names for the Preserve

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Approve an amendment to the La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve Master Plan to add a one-mile trail loop;
2. Approve the following trail names: "Harrington Creek Trail" for the main ranch road in lower La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve; "Folger Ranch Loop Trail" for a new loop trail off the main ranch road; "Coho Vista Trail" for the existing trail to the vista point in upper La Honda Creek; and "Cielo Trail" for an existing trail leading to the Redwood Cabin area.

SUMMARY

Phase I implementation of the La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve (OSP) Master Plan includes opening the Sears Ranch Road Parking Area, establishing the main Driscoll Ranch road in lower La Honda Creek as a hiking and equestrian trail, and providing permit-only equestrian parking at the former Event Center. The General Manager recommends adding an additional one-mile segment of an existing ranch road to the Phase I Trails Plan, to provide a seasonal loop opportunity, as an amendment to the Master Plan. In preparation for the opening of the Preserve, the General Manager also recommends new trail names for lower and upper La Honda Creek. The proposed trail names for lower La Honda Creek are: "Harrington Creek Trail" for the main ranch road and "Folger Ranch Trail" for the new loop. Both trails will be opened in late 2017. The proposed trail names for upper La Honda Creek are: "Coho Vista Loop Trail" for an existing unnamed trail leading to the vista point and "Cielo Trail" for an existing unnamed trail leading to the Redwood Cabin area. Both trails in upper La Honda Creek are open to the public, but remain unnamed to date.

DISCUSSION

Phase I Master Plan Implementation

The La Honda Creek OSP Master Plan includes critical stewardship actions to enhance wildlife habitat and watershed function, balanced with phased public access improvements. Phase I implementation of Master Plan is substantially complete, and lower La Honda Creek is scheduled to open to the public in late fall 2017. The Phase I Trails Plan (Attachment 1) includes the following elements:

- Open the new Sears Ranch Road Parking Area to provide 21 regular parking spaces, one ADA-accessible space, and other standard amenities, including a double vault restroom, and interpretive, wayfinding, and regulatory signage;
- Open approximately 5 miles of the main ranch road on the former Driscoll Ranch to hiking and equestrian use;
- Provide permit-only equestrian parking at the former Event Center property on an interim basis until a site specific plan can be developed for the property;
- Designate the one-mile segment of the main ranch road connecting to the Event Center for permit-only equestrian use;
- Prohibit off-trail use within the former Driscoll Ranch on an interim basis until Phase II trails are complete.

Below is a list of projects completed or underway to prepare the lower area of the Preserve for public use (does not include resource management, lease, or operational tasks):

Project Description		Status of Project
Planning and Administrative Tasks		
	Conduct neighborhood meeting to review the Phase I Trails Plan and Sears Ranch Road parking area	Complete
	Conduct historic resources evaluation of ranch structures	Complete
	Farm Bureau consultation to review the proposed parking area, demolitions, conservation grazing signage	Complete
	Establish a ranger residence on the former Cunha property	Complete
	LFPAC review of proposed new trail names	Complete
	Develop signboard and brochure maps	Underway
Capital Improvements		
	Rock road and install drainage improvements on the main ranch road in preparation for increased use	Complete
	Construct the Sears Ranch Road parking area	Contract pending
	Widen and pave the Sears Ranch road for improved safety	Contract pending
	Repair decking and install handrails on the Harrington Creek Bridge	Underway
	Install self-closing pedestrian gates throughout new trail system	Underway
	Demolish and clean up ranch structures not needed for lease operation	Complete
	Demolish and clean up site of former dog kennel house	Contract pending
	Minor improvements to the Event Center equestrian permit parking area	Underway
	Install regulatory, educational, and interpretive signage	Underway
	Install trail directional signage and trail sign markers to clarify trail routes and assist with wayfinding	Underway

Addition of a One Mile Trail Loop

In addition to the Board-approved implementation actions described above, the General Manager recommended adding the following trail loop to the Phase I Trails Plan, as an amendment to the Master Plan:

- A one-mile loop trail through the former Folger Ranch area, to be open on a seasonal basis to hiking and equestrian use only.

In April 2016, the Planning and Natural Resources (PNR) Committee considered the proposed additional one-mile trail loop in the former Folger Ranch area. The new trail loop would follow the alignment of an existing ranch road and provide an alternate loop route rather than a dead-end, out-and-back trail experience. This loop, which would be closed during the rainy season due to locally poorly drained soils and ponding water, is intended to improve the user experience by providing additional access to the southern area of the Preserve. The loop opportunity will also encourage compliance by hikers who will not be allowed to hike past the trail-loop junction at this time. The PNR Committee recommended that the General Manager forward this new trail loop to the full Board for consideration in April of 2016 (R-16-48).

Proposed New Trail Names

The main ranch road through southern La Honda Creek traverses the Harrington Creek watershed and crosses the creek approximately 1.7 miles from the Sears Ranch Road Preserve entrance (Attachment 1). Harrington Creek is an important perennial tributary to San Gregorio Creek and supports the federally-threatened California red-legged frog and Steelhead salmon. In light of the District's goal of reinforcing the value of the public's local natural resources, and as confirmed by LFPAC, the General Manager recommends naming the main ranch road "Harrington Creek Trail".

The proposed new one-mile loop off the main ranch road provides access to the former Folger Ranch. The Folger family and other wealthy San Francisco area families were instrumental in maintaining cattle grazing as an enduring land use on the San Mateo County coast, which the District continues to support. A knowledge of ranching history on Preserve lands is critical to understanding the Preserve today. Therefore, as confirmed by LFPAC, the General Manager recommends designating this loop as the "Folger Ranch Loop Trail".

In addition to the new trails in lower La Honda Creek, two existing trails in upper La Honda Creek also would benefit from formalized names. The first trail is a 1.4 mile loop and 0.5 mile extension connecting the permit-only Allen Road parking lot to the vista point, which provides sweeping views of the San Gregorio Creek watershed. The District is the largest landowner within this watershed, protecting 34% of all watershed lands located within La Honda Creek and El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserves. Further downstream, San Gregorio Creek is one of the last remaining coastal streams that supports Coho salmon, and the District has partnered with the San Mateo County Resource Conservation District to improve instream habitat for this species. As confirmed by LFPAC, the General Manager therefore recommends that the loop trail and extension to the vista point be named the "Coho Vista Loop Trail" and "Coho Vista Trail", respectively.

Branching off this trail, a second, 1.2-mile trail leads north toward the Redwood Cabin. This area comprises the former Dyer property, also known as Cielo Ranch. Cielo, the Spanish word for sky, is presumably a reference to the Skyline area. The General Manager therefore recommends that this trail leading towards the ridgeline be designated as the "Cielo Trail". This name was chosen based on LFPAC's direction to staff to identify a more straightforward and understandable name than the originally proposed "Regismontana Trail" (*Arctostaphylos regismontana* is the scientific name for King's Mountain manzanita, a rare plant prevalent along the trail).

Consistency with the San Mateo Coastal Annexation Area Service Plan (June, 2003)

The former Driscoll Ranch portion of the Preserve (lower La Honda Creek) is within the Coastsides Protection Area. Therefore, the proposed Phase I Trails Plan incorporates all applicable Implementation Actions of the *Service Plan* and the mitigation measures of the San Mateo County Coastal Annexation Final EIR, including siting and management of trails and staging areas, consultation with the Farm Bureau and other stakeholders, and construction best management practices.

BOARD COMMITTEE REVIEW

The Planning and Natural Resources Committee considered the proposed addition of the Folger Ranch Loop Trail in April 2016 (R-16-48). The Legislative and Public Affairs Committee considered the proposed new trail names in August 2016 (R-16-110). All other actions associated with the Phase I Trails Plan were considered and approved by the Board of Directors as part of the La Honda Creek OSP Master Plan (R-12-83)

FISCAL IMPACT

The following table provides fiscal data related to Measure AA projects in lower La Honda Creek. Costs associated with the new trail directional signage and signboards are available in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2017-18 Budget. No additional costs are associated with opening the proposed one-mile loop addition to the public, as the trail already exists. Operational expenditures to maintain the signs and the one-mile trail loop would be funded by the General Fund.

MAA 007 Portfolio Allocation	\$14,825,000
Spent to Date (as of 05/15/17):	\$10,881,852
Encumbrances:	\$458,289
Fisheries Restoration Apple Orchard (07-003) Remaining Budget:	\$16,100
La Honda Creek Grazing Infrastructure (07-005) Remaining Budget:	\$69,878
Driscoll Ranch Remediation and Demolitions (07-007) Remaining Budget:	\$86,967
Sears Ranch Parking and Trail Connections (07-009) Remaining Budget	\$244,001
Sears Ranch Road Drainage Upgrade (07-010) Remaining Budget:	\$22,465
Balance Remaining (Proposed):	\$3,045,448

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notice was provided as required by the Brown Act.

CEQA COMPLIANCE

Addition of the one-mile loop trail as an amendment to the La Honda Creek OSP Master Plan is categorically exempt from CEQA under Section 15301, Existing Facilities. Section 15301 exempts operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alteration of existing public or private facilities, such as roads and trails, involving negligible or no expansion of use beyond that existing at the time of the lead agency's determination. Although the former Folger Ranch road was not proposed for public use as part of the Master Plan, the Master Plan Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration analyzed the potential impact of new public access trail uses within lower La Honda Creek and determined that all potential impacts would be less

than significant. No physical change to the environment will occur beyond what was already envisioned in the Master Plan, and use of the Preserve would not substantially increase as a result of designating the existing ranch road as a public access trail. In addition, this use would be consistent with the *Service Plan* and the mitigation measures of the San Mateo County Coastal Annexation Final EIR.

Selection of trail names is not considered a Project as defined by the California Environmental Quality Act.

NEXT STEPS

Following Board approval, the District will incorporate the new trails names for the Phase I trails in the new sign orders and revised brochure maps. New signs and signboards will be produced and installed in preparation for the grand opening of lower La Honda Creek OSP in late 2017. Moreover, the new loop trail would be added to the trail network and made ready for the grand opening as well.

Attachment

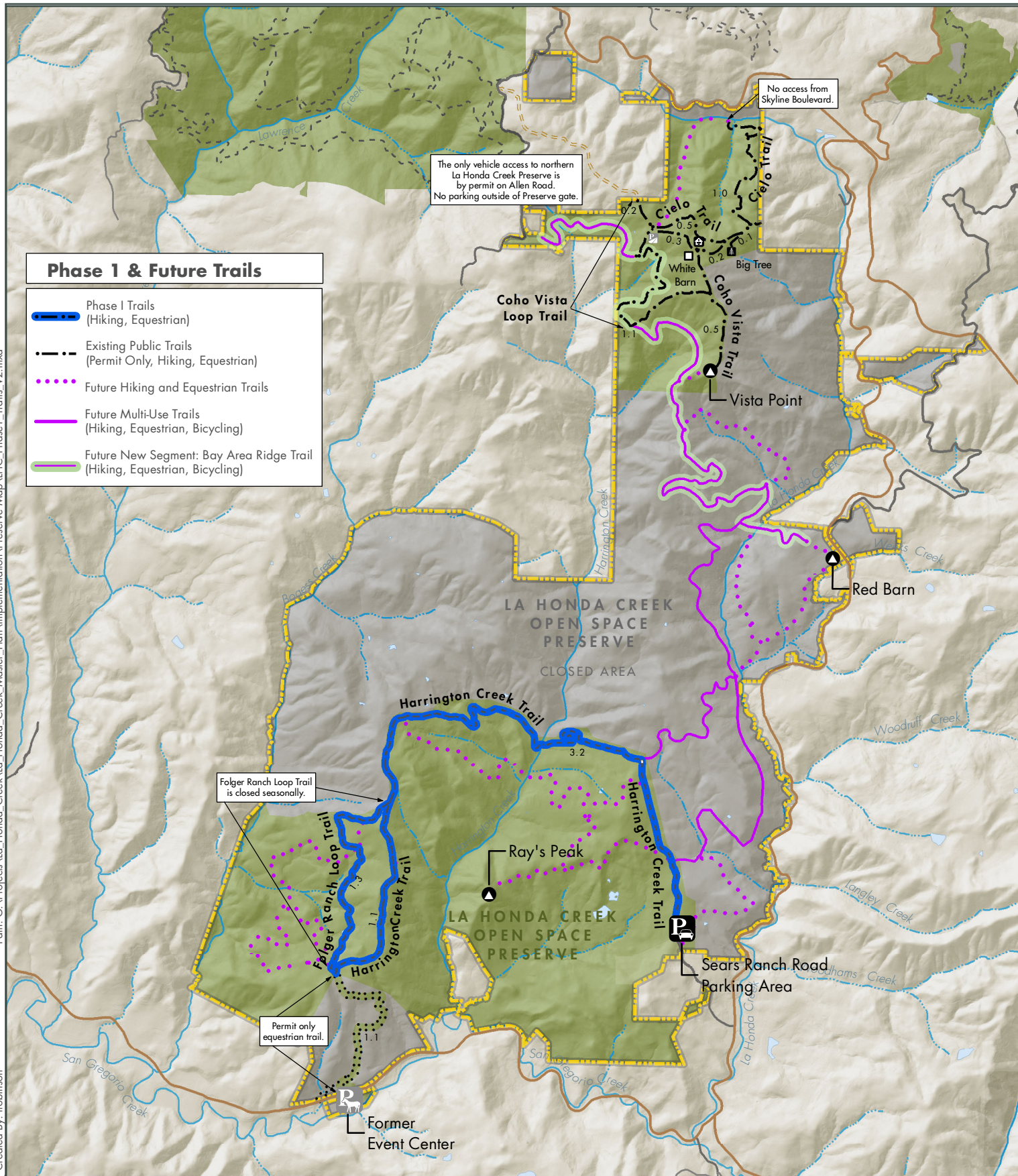
1. Lower La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve Phase I Public Access Trails Map

Responsible Department Head:

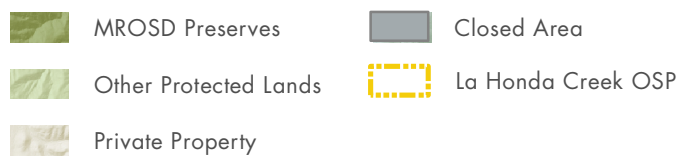
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La Honda Creek OSP: Phase 1 Trails



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District
(MROSD)

June 2017

