



Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

Memorandum

DATE: December 3, 2024

MEMO TO: Board of Directors

THROUGH: Ana Ruiz, General Manager *AR*

FROM: Susanna Chan, Assistant General Manager

SUBJECT: Progress on Big Rock Projects

The Big Rocks are projects that have the highest priorities from all the projects and programs that make up the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District)'s ambitious and extensive annual Capital Improvement and Action Plan (CIAP). The District identifies these Big Rock projects to ensure resources and capacity needed to complete their scope of work (absent outside factors out of District control) are appropriately and continuously allocated throughout the life of these projects.

On March 6, 2024, as part of the Board of Directors (Board) retreat to review the Fiscal Year (FY) 25 through FY27 CIAP, the General Manager recommended numerous projects grouped into five (5) categories as the District's Big Rocks for the FY25. Three of these categories correlate well with the Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives (Climate Resilience and Biodiversity, Public Access and Trails, and FOSM Implementation). Another (Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve Projects) recognizes the concentrated focus and level of effort underway to complete numerous public access and restoration projects at Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve (many of which are Measure AA-funded projects). The fifth category (Infrastructure Improvements) includes efforts to sustain agricultural uses and address field facility needs. The list of Big Rocks projects were subsequently updated and affirmed by the Action Plan and Budget Committee (ABC) at its May 7, 2024 meeting.

Soon after, the full Board took action on May 14, 2024 to form an Ad Hoc Committee to evaluate and prepare alternative option(s) for the future use and management of the Bear Creek Stables site and return to the Board in approximately four months. This Board action required a reevaluation of the Big Rocks list to account for a substantial diversion of resources to support Ad Hoc Committee process. A newly refined list of the Big Rocks was thus presented to the ABC on May 21, 2024 and to the full Board on June 12, 2024 as part of the first budget hearing (see list below). Projects that were removed from the Big Rocks list are shown in ~~strikeout~~ below as context. Note, that these projects remain on the CIAP, however, they can be subject to deferrals or delays due to vacancies, leaves, other higher priorities (like the Big Rocks), or other unanticipated capacity challenges.

List of Big Rocks, as refined and presented at the June 12, 2024 Board meeting

Climate Resiliency & Biodiversity Projects

- Alma Bridge Road Wildlife Passage
- Los Gatos Creek Watershed Phase 2
- ~~Wildland Fire Capacity~~
- Wildlife Corridor: Highway 17 Crossing

Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve Projects

- ~~Hwy 35 Multi-Use Trail Crossing and Parking Implementation~~
- Purisima Creek Road Vehicle Access
- Purisima to the Sea Parking
- ~~Purisima to the Sea Trail~~

Public Access and Trails

- Bay Area Ridge Trail: Highway 17 Crossing
- ~~Bear Creek Stables Project~~
- La Honda Creek Parking and Trailhead Access - Phase 1 Feasibility Study and CEQA Review
- ~~La Honda Creek Phase 2 Trail Connections~~
- Phase 2 Trail Improvements, Bear Creek Redwoods

FOSM Refresh Implementation

- FOSM Update
- Recruitments

Infrastructure Improvements

- ~~Agricultural Fencing Projects (Big Dipper Boundary, Bluebrush Canyon and Gordon Ridge)~~
- Coastal Field Office
- ~~Coastal Field Office Build-Out~~ (deferral is not due to the formation of the stables ad-hoc committee)
- ~~Lone Madrone Corrals~~
- Skyline Field Office Renovation

The status of each Big Rock project (not including the projects removed and shown in strikethrough) is summarized in Attachment 1. All Big Rock projects are on track with exception of the northeastern trailhead entrance at the junction of Bear Creek Road and Highway 17 that is technically part of the scope of work for the Bear Creek Redwoods Phase 2 Trail Improvements Project due to permitting delay with Caltrans. Otherwise, all other elements of the Phase 2 Trails, including the opening of 4.3 miles of new trail to public access, are complete.

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Table 1 - FY25 Big Rock Projects Progress Update

Project Group	Project Name	Purpose	FY25 Scope	FY26 Scope	FY27 Scope	Current Status	Comment
Climate Resilience & Biodiversity	Alma Bridge Road Newt Crossing	Partner with Santa Clara County to complete CEQA, design, permitting and implementation to provide safe passage for wildlife (newts). Midpen will retain a consultant to provide CEQA and design services to provide safe passage for newts across Alma Bridge Road. Implementation to be led by Midpen or county. Long term operation and maintenance to shift to county.	Begin design and CEQA review.	Complete CEQA and initiate permitting. County to lead final design and bidding.	County to implement. Midpen to complete effectiveness monitoring in future years.	Open – on schedule	The previous project manager recently resigned from Midpen. The project and budget have therefore been reallocated from the Natural Resources Dept to the Engineering & Construction Dept, with management support from the Planning Dept during the transition. This transition was planned to occur regardless since the project is now moving into heavy engineering design. Phase II of the project (65% Design) is underway and on schedule, and future phases of the project (Phase III – Final Design and Phase IV – Construction) are dependent on additional grant funding. The project team is working to align the project schedule with the adjacent Beatty Parking Area project, which is anticipated in mid/late 2025.
	Los Gatos Creek Watershed Phase 2	Implement the Phase 2 CalFire grant at multiple preserves to improve wildland fire resiliency to protect ecosystem function.	Begin year 1 of treatment, including the removal of high priority invasive species from projects sites. Begin seed procurement for post-treatment.	Begin year 2 of treatment, including the removal of high priority invasive species from projects sites. Continue seed procurement for post-treatment.	Begin year 3 of treatment, including the removal of high-priority invasive species from project sites. Continue seed procurement for post-treatment.	Open – on schedule	Project on schedule, to begin in late Spring/Early Summer 2025
	Wildlife Corridor: Highway 17 Crossing	Work with partners to develop, engineer, and implement wildlife crossing improvements at Highway 17 to provide safe movement for wildlife connecting over 30,000 acres of protected public lands.	Complete Caltrans Project Approval & Environmental Document (PA&ED) phase, including board certification of final CEQA document. Continue to work with Valley Transportation Agency to finalize design plan and secure permits. Begin preparing bid package materials for implementation. Finalize work on Mitigation Credit Agreement.	Continue to work with Valley Transportation Agency. If project has Caltrans approval, has received permits and funding, solicit bids, award contract and begin construction.	Continue to work with Valley Transportation Agency, If project has Caltrans approval, has received permits and funding, solicit bids, award contract and begin construction.	Open – on schedule	Conclusion of the Caltrans Project Approval and Environmental Document (PA&ED) phase is expected in December 2024. Valley Transportation Agency (VTA) and consultant BKF will commence design and permitting phase upon completion of the PA&ED.

Project Group	Project Name	Purpose	FY25 Scope	FY26 Scope	FY27 Scope	Current Status	Comment
Purisima Creek Redwoods	Purisima Creek Road Vehicle Access	Purisima Creek Road is not passable due to a washout from the 2022-23 storms. Assess road for long-term viability as a road, including potential replacement of three bridges. Rebuild washouts and replace bridges for patrol and emergency vehicle access.	Develop design and construction plans. Start CEQA review. The scope of work and budget is subject to change following additional assessment from FEMA and staff.	Submit for permits. Project Bid. Begin road and bridge repairs.	Continue construction.	Open – on schedule	Project includes slide repairs and bridge replacement. Project is proceeding as planned. The District has been pursuing FEMA funding for this project and has recently determined that completing the slide repairs within the FEMA funding timeframe (completing construction by 2026) is unattainable given the level of effort and time required to complete CEQA, regulatory permitting, local permitting, and design development. As a result, completion of the project will need to rely on internal funds versus FEMA funding. Staff will continue to move the slide repair scope of work forward with the goal of completing construction in calendar year 2027 or 2028, which is dependent on receiving approval and issuance of all regulatory and local permits. Additionally, staff is focusing on completing a bridge replacement within the preserve that should meet the FEMA funding timeframe.
Public Access & Trails	Bay Area Ridge Trail: Highway 17 Crossing	Provide a regional recreational trail crossing across Highway 17 in Santa Clara County by constructing a new overcrossing near Los Gatos and Lexington Reservoir in close alignment with the Highway 17 Wildlife Crossing project MAA20-001. See project MAA20-004 for description of relevant new trails and connections associated with the overcrossing.	Complete Caltrans Project Approval & Environmental Document (PA&ED) phase, including board certification of final CEQA document. Continue collaboration with VTA on Plans, Specifications and Estimates (PS&E), permitting of crossing structure and improvements within the Caltrans ROW. Continue to work on securing property access for connecting trails before constructing the trail crossing. Continue to work on developing agreements as needed	Continue collaboration with VTA to complete PS&E for construction of crossing structure and improvements within the Caltrans right-of-way. Finalize property access requirements and secure permits for construction of connecting trails. Finalize partnership agreements with partner agencies and organizations as needed.	Continue collaboration with VTA to begin construction on crossing structure and improvements within the Caltrans right-of-way, if there is sufficient funding for construction.	Open – on schedule	Conclusion of the Caltrans PA&ED phase is expected in December 2024. VTA and consultant BKF will commence design and permitting phase upon completion of the PA&ED.

Project Group	Project Name	Purpose	FY25 Scope	FY26 Scope	FY27 Scope	Current Status	Comment
			with partner agencies and organizations.				
	Bear Creek Redwoods (BCR) Phase 2 Trail Improvements	Implement Phase 2 trail improvements, including multi-use through-trail connection, to open northeastern part of Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve to public access.	Enter into maintenance agreement of northeast trailhead with Santa Clara County. Secure building permit, bid and award, and begin construction of northeast trailhead.	Complete construction of northeast trailhead.	Project completed in prior fiscal year(s).	Open – experiencing permitting delay outside of District control	Construction of the BCR Phase 2 trails was completed. The last remaining project element is the construction of the northeast trailhead within the Caltrans right-of-way (ROW). The Northeast Trailhead Project continues to move through the Caltrans design exception request review and approval process. Approval of the design exception request is required to allow for non-ADA compliant pathways and structures (trail steps) within the Caltrans ROW (this is due to steep grades to make the connection). Caltrans has also outlined the requirement for additional project design reviews and approvals of an Encroachment Policy Exception Request and a Design Standard Decision Document to allow for the proposed trail steps and retaining walls within the Caltrans ROW. Staff and the project engineer are currently reviewing application comments received from Caltrans and crafting responses. Additionally, staff continues to coordinate with Santa Clara County Roads & Airports and Caltrans on finalizing the required maintenance agreements between the three agencies, which will allow for portions of the new trailhead to be constructed within the Caltrans ROW and maintained by Midpen. The maintenance agreements require approval by the County Board of Supervisors and District Board of Directors. Once approved, staff will submit the 95% plans for local permitting. These permitting requirements may potentially delay construction of the northeast trailhead from FY26 (current plan) to FY27. The Board decided not to open a multiuse trail using a route over the trails constructed in Phase II. Instead, the Board approved additional trail construction to create a separate multiuse alignment, prior to opening a multiuse trail, therefore the project purpose, “including multi-use through-trail connection” will now be delivered through a separate project:

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							VP21-006 Phase 2 Multituse Trail, Bear Creek Redwoods which is scheduled to start in FY26.
	La Honda Creek Phase 2 Trails	Implement master plan Phase 2 trails to connect visitors from the Harrington Creek Trail to the central and northern areas of La Honda Creek Preserve.	Proceed with construction.	Complete construction.	Project completed in prior fiscal year(s).	Open – on schedule	Construction of 1.57 miles of new trail was completed in the fall of 2024. Engineering and Construction (E&C) and Land & Facilities (L&F) are coordinating on the road surface design and preparing a bid package that is expected to be issued in the spring of 2025, with construction anticipated in the summer of 2025. The Skyline Field Office Crew will complete additional work on the roads and trails during the summer of 2025 to prepare for a public opening in late fall 2025.
Implement FOSM Refresh	FOSM Update	Provide a comprehensive update and implementation of the Financial Organization Sustainability Model (FOSM) with a focus on program delivery, organization, reporting structure, staffing and financial sustainability and a broader 10-year outlook.	Implement FOSM Refresh recommendations scheduled for FY25.	Implement FOSM Refresh recommendations scheduled for FY26.	Implement FOSM Refresh recommendations scheduled for FY27.	Open – on schedule	Progress is on schedule and reported out under a separate Agenda Item at this same meeting.
	Recruitments	Support FOSM refresh implementation	Implement FOSM Refresh recommendations scheduled for FY25.	Implement FOSM Refresh recommendations scheduled for FY26.	Implement FOSM Refresh recommendations scheduled for FY27.	Open – on schedule	Progress is on schedule and reported out under a separate Agenda Item at this same meeting.
Infrastructure Improvements	Coastal Field Office	Secure property to establish a coastal field office for field staff to support coastal land holdings.	Secure coastal field office site through lease or purchase.	Continue effort if additional time is needed.	Continue effort if additional time is needed.	Open – date for completion uncertain	Continuing to pursue opportunities, including a new potential purchase opportunity off Highway 1 near downtown Half Moon Bay.
	Skyline Field Office Renovation	Renovate existing or build new structures to continue supporting field staff operational needs in the Skyline Field Office (SFO) region.	Continue programming and pre-design analysis.	Initiate concept plan and feasibility study development.	Pending board selection of a project alternative, initiate CEQA. Pending CEQA certification, initiate land use permits.	Open – on schedule	The consultants completed a rapid assessment of three potential sites for a new field office. The project team developed site evaluation criteria, which was approved by the Board in October 2025. Staff will present the findings and recommendations from the rapid assessment to the Board for selection of a preferred site in January 2025. After a preferred site is selected, the project will move into the conceptual design phase.