

FY24 Major Accomplishments Report

JULY 1, 2023-JUNE 30, 2024



Headquarters in Los Altos, California



MISSION The mission of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District is 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.

COASTSIDE MISSION 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.



PHOTO CREDITS

- Cover, top: Stevens Creek Shoreline Nature Area (Midpen staff)
- Cover, lower left: San Jose State University (San Jose State University)
- Cover, lower middle: La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve (Midpen staff)
- Cover, lower right: La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve (Austen Baxter)
- This page: Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve (Richard Jarvis)

FY24 Major Accomplishments Report

JULY 1, 2023-JUNE 30, 2024

As we conclude fiscal year 2024, this report highlights significant accomplishments in Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District's (Midpen's) priority program areas.

PRIORITY PROGRAM AREAS

Land Acquisition and Preservation

Midpen seeks to purchase or otherwise acquire interest in the maximum feasible area of strategic open space land within the District, including baylands, foothills and ridgelines, and link its open space lands with federal, state, county and city parklands and watershed lands.

Public Access, Education and Outreach

Midpen provides public access to the open space lands for low-intensity recreational uses to everyone, regardless of physical abilities or economic status.

Natural Resource Protection and Restoration

Midpen protects and restores the natural diversity and integrity of its resources for their value to the environment and the public.

Assets and Organizational Support

Midpen employs a highly capable and professional staff and provides them with the facilities and resources needed to run an efficient and responsible organization on behalf of the public.

ICON KEY



Land Acquisition and Preservation



Natural Resource Protection and Restoration



Public Access, Education and Outreach



Assets and Organizational Support



Agriculture



Diversity, Equity and Inclusion



Wildlife Fire Resiliency



Measure AA

Midpen is proud of the work we've accomplished to serve our communities and region, in close collaboration with partner agencies. All projects and programs reflect the priorities set annually by the board of directors.

View prior year Major Accomplishments Reports at openspace.org/reports.

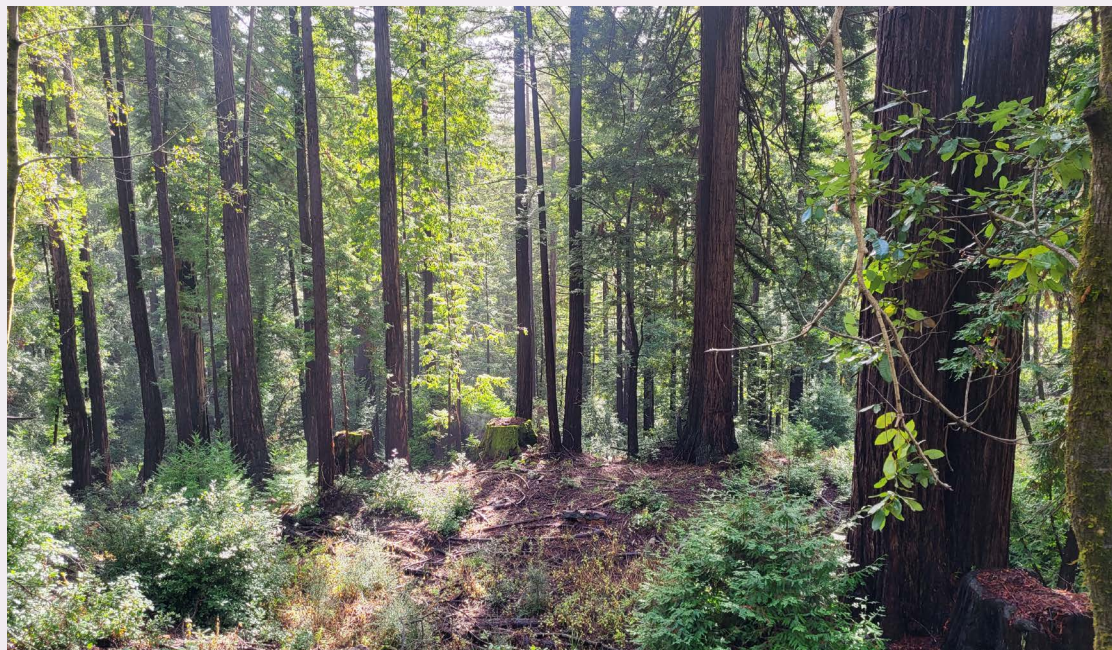


Land Acquisition and Preservation



MAA PROPERTY ADDITION TO LA HONDA CREEK OPEN SPACE PRESERVE

With the completed acquisitions of the Eberhard property in December of 2023 and the Fifths property in May of 2024, a total of 156 acres were added to La Honda Creek in FY24. These acquisitions protect redwood forested lands and wildlife habitat on the headwaters of La Honda Creek within the San Gregorio watershed. In terms of public access, the Eberhard acquisition advances a connection between La Honda Creek and El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserves. The Eberhard acquisition was made possible in part by Measure AA funding and a grant from the Moore Foundation (\$1 million).



La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve (Midpen staff)

TRAIL EASEMENT ADDITION TO PURISIMA CREEK REDWOODS OPEN SPACE PRESERVE

Midpen closed escrow on a forested, 3.7-acre trail easement area as an addition to Purisima Creek Redwoods. The Boothroyd-Krebs public trail easement is located southerly adjacent to the preserve and may be utilized in the future as part of the Purisima-to-the-Sea Trail or other trails within the preserve.

TRAIL EASEMENT ADDITION TO TEAGUE HILL OPEN SPACE PRESERVE

Midpen secured a 50-foot-wide public trail easement as an addition to Teague Hill Open Space Preserve, protecting public access on an existing segment of the Skyline Trail.



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PROPERTY ADDITION TO MIRAMONTES RIDGE OPEN SPACE PRESERVE

In May of 2024, Midpen finalized the purchase of a 644-acre portion of the undeveloped uplands area of the Johnston Ranch property from the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST). The purchase continues to protect 1.2 miles of Arroyo Leon Creek, a tributary to Pilarcitos Creek, with potential spawning and rearing habitat for steelhead trout. The purchase also provides opportunities for public access through expanding and connecting local trail systems. This acquisition was made possible in part by Measure AA funding and grants from the California Coastal Conservancy (\$500,000) and California Department of Parks and Recreation Habitat Conservation Fund (\$200,000).



Miramontes Ridge Open Space Preserve (Aaron Peth)

PROPERTY ADDITION TO SIERRA AZUL OPEN SPACE PRESERVE

In September of 2023, Midpen closed escrow on a 40.83-acre property as an addition to Sierra Azul. The Vielbaum property rests at 3,400 feet in elevation and is bordered by the 19,437.84-acre Sierra Azul Preserve to the north, east and south and private property to the west. The purchase protects fire-adaptive California bay forest and serpentine leather-oak chaparral within the Upper Los Gatos Creek and Upper Guadalupe Creek watersheds. In March of 2024, Midpen obtained an access easement over several road segments in the Rancho de Guadalupe area of Sierra Azul for patrol and maintenance purposes.



Natural Resource Protection and Restoration



WILDLAND FIRE FUEL REDUCTION AND WILDLAND FIRE RESILIENCY TREATMENTS THROUGHOUT THE DISTRICT

Midpen remains hard at work to support healthy forests that are resilient to wildland fire and climate change as part of our Wildland Fire Resiliency Program. Staff continue to identify partnerships, grant funding and ways to increase Midpen’s resource management capacity.

Midpen is currently involved in several collaborative groups to create a more fire resilient region. As part of Midpen’s work with the Los Gatos Creek Watershed Collaborative, 254 acres at Bear Creek Redwoods, Long Ridge and Sierra Azul Open Space Preserves have received forest health treatments. In addition, fuel reduction work was completed in areas of La Honda Creek, Windy Hill, Coal Creek, Skyline Ridge and Russian Ridge Open Space Preserves by FireSafe San Mateo, Woodside Fire Protection District, San Mateo RCD and Midpen staff.

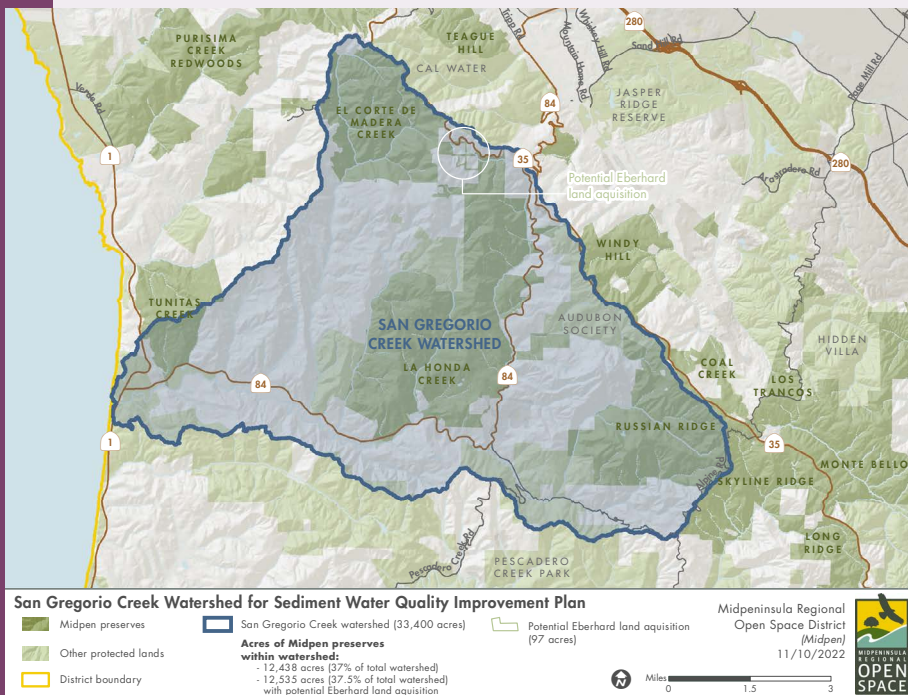
One of many ways Midpen prepares for fire season is an annual spring training for our rangers and other wildland firefighting-certified staff to keep their skills current. This year, Midpen also identified five staff members as future Resource Advisors and have sent them to obtain their red card training, the first step in a two- to three-year training program. The primary role of a Resource Advisor is to identify and evaluate potential impacts and benefits of fire operations (wildland or prescribed fire) on natural and cultural resources.

Meanwhile, in an effort to train the next generation of land and fire management stewards, Midpen teamed up with the San Francisco Conservation Corps, who have already begun forest health work in Midpen preserves. Midpen trained the Corps members in topics such as wildlife biology and fire ecology, as well as land management techniques like preventing the spread of invasive species, arboriculture and sensitively thinning trees and vegetation for conservation purposes.

WATER QUALITY IMPROVEMENTS IN THE SAN GREGORIO CREEK WATERSHED

Midpen owns roughly 40% of the 33,000-acre San Gregorio Creek watershed. San Gregorio Creek was first listed as a sediment-impaired waterbody in 1998 under the Federal Clean Water Act. This year, in coordination with the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board, Midpen completed a sediment inventory

of the watershed which identified the top 20 sites for reducing sediment. Of the 446 stream-crossing and culvert sites assessed, 13% showed evidence of active erosion, 31% had potential erosion while the majority (56%) had a low potential for erosion. Overall, Midpen’s relative sediment contribution is low compared to the total human-caused sediment delivery within the watershed. Thankfully, Midpen’s routine maintenance and best management practices have provided a substantial head start in reducing sediment delivered to San Gregorio Creek. A final report is now available and will further enable the protection and enhancement of water quality and stream habitat over a long-term period for listed species such as steelhead trout and coho salmon.





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HABITAT IMPROVEMENTS FOR TURTLES AND BATS AT LA HONDA CREEK OPEN SPACE PRESERVE

The western pond turtle (*Actinemys marmorata*) is California’s only native freshwater turtle. Unfortunately, this California “species of special concern”, has experienced population reductions of 75-80% due to loss of habitat, predation and competition from non-native turtle species. This year, Midpen successfully completed spillway repairs at Lower Turtle Pond, located within La Honda Creek. Ponds provide prime habitat for turtles; their time in the sun is essential to shell development and overall health. These improvements not only support special status species recovery for the western pond turtle, but also the federally endangered San Francisco garter snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis tetrataenia*) and federally threatened California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*). The project also improves flood resiliency and maintains conservation grazing water availability.



La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve (Frances Freyberg)

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La Honda Creek is also home to eight different species of bats, several of which are California state species of special concern and are extremely beneficial to the environment. Several bats were found in the immediate area of the 160-year-old White Barn. The barn, located along the Cielo Trail, was in dire need of structural repairs for preservation and public safety. This year, Midpen completed stabilization and repairs, which included bat-specific enhancements to the interior of the barn.



WILDLIFE-FRIENDLY LIVESTOCK FENCES FOR GRAZING UNITS AT PURISIMA CREEK REDWOODS AND LA HONDA CREEK OPEN SPACE PRESERVES

Conservation grazing is integral to the management of approximately 15,000 acres of the District’s Open Space Preserves on the San Mateo County coast. Coastal prairies and native grassland comprise one of the most biodiverse and threatened ecosystems in North America. In September of 2023, Midpen completed approximately 14,000 linear feet of wildlife-friendly livestock fences in the 450-acre Lobitos/Elkus property and the neighboring 340-acre Lobitos Ridge property, which protect riparian resources in both the Lobitos Creek and San Gregorio Creek watersheds.

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LANDFILL REMEDIATION AT BEAR CREEK REDWOODS OPEN SPACE PRESERVE

When Midpen acquired Bear Creek Redwoods in 1999, the land had been heavily used and manipulated by human hands. As part of Midpen’s mission to reclaim natural areas and restore the land’s natural functions to support a healthy thriving ecosystem, staff recently completed the cleanup of this old landfill discovered within the preserve. The cleanup involved two distinct efforts: systematically collecting and documenting as many historic artifacts as possible, and removing contaminated soil and other hazardous waste, which

included 274 tons of hazardous soils and ash, three tons of recyclable metals, one cubic yard of non-friable asbestos containing materials, 32 tires, 1.5 tons of general waste and debris and an undocumented 500-gallon fuel storage tank along the Alma Loop Trail.



Bottom: Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve (Midpen)

MONITORING OF LEHIGH QUARRY RIDGELINE EASEMENT AND RECLAMATION PLAN

Midpen hired a consultant to prepare a report on ridgeline easement conditions and track conditions for three years. The original easement was put in place to avoid further loss of the ridgeline and ridgeline views from quarry activities. After a second year of monitoring, major breaches of the ridgeline easement before 2022 were clear. Since then, no one has reported major system failures. But, heavy rains worsened cracks and caused landslides in the quarry wall. Also, a monument delineating the boundary of a separate conservation easement went missing. Midpen requested Lehigh to replace the monument, per the easement. Midpen also supported Santa Clara County's new mining ordinance. It requires Lehigh to maintain a 50-foot buffer from groundwater. It also supported the completeness of Lehigh Quarry's 2023 Reclamation Plan Amendment application.



ADOPTED NEW AGRICULTURAL POLICY

After extensive public and stakeholder outreach, Midpen adopted a comprehensive agricultural policy in November 2023. The policy reaffirms Midpen's work preserving upland grazing areas protected through acquisition and conservation grazing leases, which support both agriculture and grassland habitats. It also adds policy framework working with partners to support the preservation of row crops and other intensive agricultural lands through affirmative agricultural easements and to support farm worker housing. The policy emphasizes ecologically sensitive agricultural practices, operations that embrace Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and consideration for local preference when selecting agricultural tenants.



Public Access, Interpretation, Education & Outreach

2022-23 WINTER STORMS REPAIR UPDATE

The winter storms of 2022-23 demonstrated how destructive winter storms can be to trails. The unprecedented deluge caused landslides, toppled thousands of trees and disrupted access to preserves and trails for visitors and Midpen staff. This year, Midpen crew repaired the damage to trails and culverts as well as two major landslides in Bear Creek Redwoods and Sierra Azul Open Space Preserves. Whether we are in for a quiet winter or a series of intense storms this year, we have Midpen's field crews to thank for their tireless work.

GUIDED HIKES AT CLOVERDALE RANCH OPEN SPACE PRESERVE

Following the acquisition of Midpen's 27th open space preserve in FY23, Midpen has welcomed the public to Cloverdale Ranch. In July of 2023, District staff hosted two initial "Community Field Day" events, with three subsequent docent-led hikes throughout the fiscal year, inviting people to experience and learn more about coastal grasslands and the role of conservation grazing at the preserve.



Cloverdale Ranch Open Space Preserve (Midpen)

TRAIL PROJECTS AT BEAR CREEK REDWOODS, COAL CREEK, PULGAS RIDGE, RUSSIAN RIDGE AND LA HONDA CREEK OPEN SPACE PRESERVES

This year, Midpen opened approximately 1.1 miles of additional trails to the public! In coordination with the City of San Carlos, Midpen designated a new trailhead with amenities and an unnamed 0.1-mile trail segment at Pulgas Ridge. The new trail segment is open to hiking and dogs on leash and connects the trailhead with the Dusky-footed Woodrat Trail. At Russian Ridge, Midpen utilized a former interior unpaved road to access a beautiful ridgeline vista point, opening the 0.5-mile Fog Drift Vista Trail for hiking, equestrian and bicycle use.

MAA Meanwhile, Midpen completed trail improvements in Coal Creek that reestablished the Alpine Trail as a safe connection between Portola Valley and Skyline Boulevard. In fall of 2023, work concluded on two retaining walls that will prevent a total washout at the trailhead to maintain this portion of the trail for visitor use and emergency response vehicle access, while reducing sediment into Corte de Madera Creek. In spring of 2024, Midpen completed the removal of the informal bypass trail and opened connections to the new, more sustainable 0.5-mile bypass trail.



Coal Creek Open Space Preserve (Frances Freyberg)



MAA In Los Gatos, Midpen staff and contractors are finalizing more than two miles of trails within the northeastern portion of Bear Creek Redwoods that will be opened to the public in the coming fiscal year. These trails will increase the land's ecological health and eventually provide opportunities to explore an area of the preserve that was previously only accessible via permit. This project is made possible in part to Measure AA funding and a \$2.5 million grant from the California Natural Resources Agency.



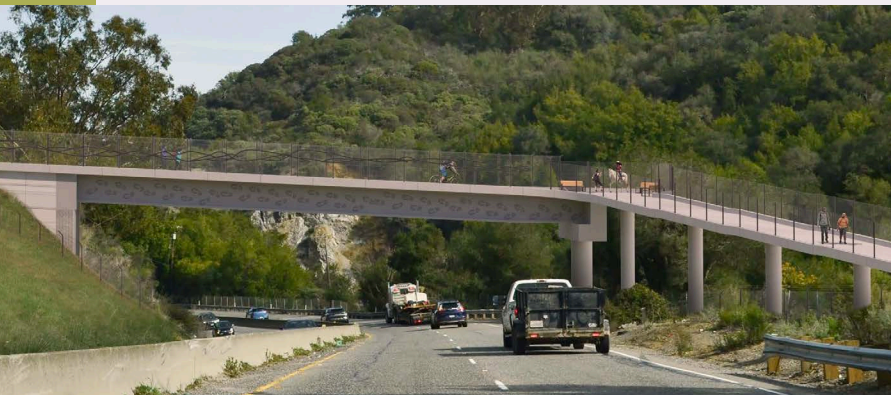
La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve (Austen Baxter)



MAA On the coast, Midpen secured permits and initiated trail construction that will ultimately connect visitors from the Harrington Creek Trail in the southern area of La Honda Creek to the central and northern areas of the preserve. Since first opening to the public in 2017, the preserve has become a regional destination for birding.

MAA HIGHWAY 17 TRAIL OVERCROSSING SELECTED, DESIGN PLANS AND ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW UNDERWAY

While greenbelts and open spaces are critical for the health of animals and people alike, their benefits are exponentially greater when they are connected. Midpen reached a major milestone in the Highway 17 Wildlife and Trail Crossing project. In May of 2024, the Midpen board of directors selected the northern trail overcrossing location, which will connect the Los Gatos Creek Trail to El Sereno Open Space Preserve. The future trail overcrossing will connect over 50 miles of existing regional trails and will also be accompanied by a separate wildlife undercrossing. This past fiscal year, Midpen and our partners moved our conceptual design plans toward the preparation of more detailed construction plans and administered the public review period for the environmental analysis document for the project.



Rendition of pedestrian bridge connecting Los Gatos Creek Trail and El Sereno Open Space Preserve (Midpen)

PLANNING AT PURISIMA CREEK OPEN SPACE PRESERVE

MAA Along Skyline Boulevard in the Santa Cruz Mountains, the vision of a public trail encircling Bay Area ridgetops is being realized piece by piece. The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) is planning a new Bay Area Ridge Trail segment on their watershed lands that would terminate near Purisima Creek Redwoods' North Ridge parking area. This year, the Midpen board of directors approved the preferred conceptual parking design for expanded parking to accommodate the new Bay Area Ridge Trail segment, as well as the Highway 35 trail crossing location that will connect the east and west trail systems in this northern area of the preserve. This project is made possible in part due to partnership funding from SFPUC, POST and the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council.

MAA Connecting to the coast, planning continues for the Purisima-to-the-Sea Trail (which will become a significant portion of the future and larger Bay to Sea Trail) and a new coastal trailhead and parking area. Midpen's board of directors have approved contracts for design development and environmental review for these projects, which are now underway.

Preserve-wide, Midpen is performing multimodal access planning to understand how transportation demand management strategies, such as shuttle services, carpool and reservation parking and real-time parking information, can be incorporated into existing and future trailheads to improve the experience for both preserve visitors and neighbors. As part of this work, the board approved the development of a formal carpool lot at the main Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve trailhead based on findings from a prior carpool pilot program. Design work to repurpose the lower west lot for carpools will begin in FY25. This project was awarded the **California Chapter Northern Excellence Award!**

PLANNING AT HAWTHORNS AREA OF WINDY HILL OPEN SPACE PRESERVE

Midpen formed a public access working group in June of 2023 to collaborate with Midpen on a plan for introducing public access to the 79-acre Hawthorns Area of Windy Hill. After a total of seven meetings, the working group developed their final recommendations for parking and trails, which will be presented to the Planning & Natural Resources Committee later in 2024.

MAA As part of a separate planning effort, Midpen formed and worked with an Ad Hoc Committee to draft the long-term vision and goals for the 13-acre Hawthorns Historic Complex, located within Hawthorns Area. At the direction of the Ad Hoc Committee, Midpen staff engaged a structural engineer to further evaluate potential

reuse options and cost estimates for the Hawthorns mansion. Midpen staff also developed an interim stabilization and debris removal plan that proposes to mitigate structural degradation over the next five to 10 years for structures that retain historical integrity for board consideration to lay out a pathway for on-the-ground stabilization and cleanup work. The Historic Hawthorns Complex vision and goals will be brought to the board of directors for approval in FY25.



Hawthorns Public Access Working Group Meeting (Midpen)

INTERPRETATION AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Docents are long-term volunteers who educate and inspire preserve visitors through hosting interpretive hikes and bicycle/horseback rides, welcoming visitors on weekends at the Daniels C. Nature Center, located in Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve, or conducting field trips for elementary school students.



TRAILS AND STEWARDSHIP PROGRAMS

Trails and Stewardship Program volunteers deliver hands-on landscape restoration, assist visitors along the trails, contribute to community science and increase community awareness through both short and long-term programs.



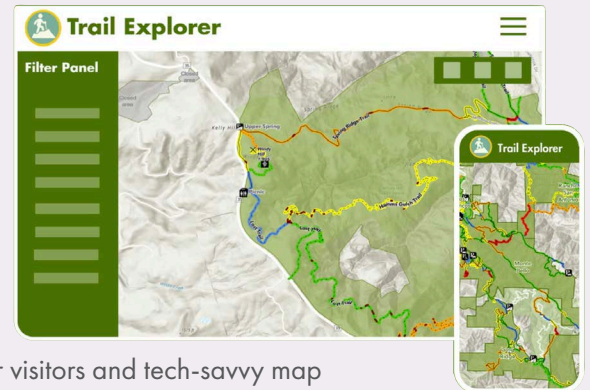


Assets and Organizational Support

LEVERAGING GIS TO VISUALIZE MIDPEN LAND AND COMMUNITY

While spreadsheets are valuable for data organization, mapping unlocks a deeper understanding. It reveals spatial distribution, concentration areas and empowers data-driven decisions with a geographic lens. This year, Midpen's Geographic Information Systems (GIS) team released several applications for users to explore:

It took more than three years for interns in the Planning department to walk and assess all 255 miles of Midpen's trails to develop **Trail Explorer**, an interactive online experience designed to help visitors plan an outing to Midpen preserves. Trail Explorer was launched on November 15, International GIS Day, and subsequently received the **Merit Award in Technology** from California Trails and Greenways.



Open Data Midpen, Midpen's central hub of GIS data and interactive mapping applications, is now available for visitors and tech-savvy map enthusiasts who want to plan their outdoor activities or learn more about Midpen preserves.

For those looking to explore demographics in California and reveal meaningful trends on a census tract level, Midpen proudly presents the **Disadvantaged Communities Explorer** and the **California Demographics Data Explorer** dashboards. The dynamic dashboard duo received an **Innovation Award** from the California Society of Municipal Finance Officers. The data is updated annually to ensure relevance and accuracy.

CUTTING THROUGH GREEN TAPE

With over 900 culverts, 150 trail bridges and 230 miles of streams across our preserves, Midpen's professional trails crews are constantly making improvements and conducting ongoing maintenance activities. Administering these activities as a program, as opposed to individual activities, allows us to apply a consistent set of methods, best management practices and impact avoidance approaches. This year, Midpen worked with San Mateo County to streamline the local permitting process, which will reduce project delays over the next five years.

FINANCIAL & OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Completed a comprehensive update of Midpen's Financial Organization Sustainability Model with an emphasis on a five-year detailed outlook on program delivery, organization, reporting structure, staffing and financial sustainability.

Received the Government Finance Officers Association's special **Triple Crown medallion** for preparing annual comprehensive financial reports that embody the spirit of transparency:

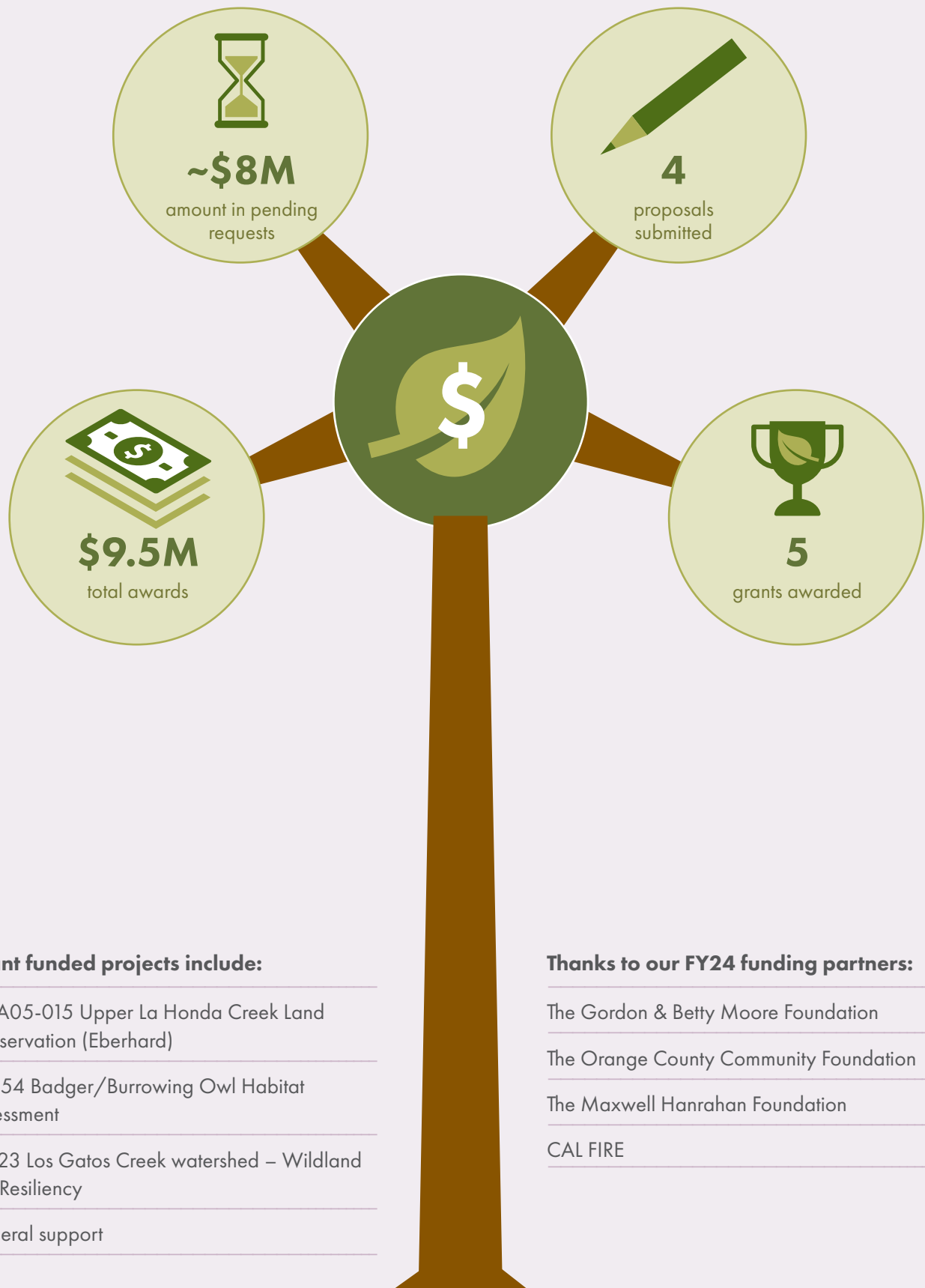
Distinguished Budget Presentation Award (eighth year).

Annual Comprehensive Financial Report Award (sixth year).

Popular Annual Financial Report Award (fifth year).

Received the California Society of Municipal Finance Officers **Budget Award** (sixth straight year).

GRANTS PROGRAM



Grant funded projects include:

MAA05-015 Upper La Honda Creek Land Conservation (Eberhard)

80054 Badger/Burrowing Owl Habitat Assessment

61023 Los Gatos Creek watershed – Wildland Fire Resiliency

General support

Thanks to our FY24 funding partners:

The Gordon & Betty Moore Foundation

The Orange County Community Foundation

The Maxwell Hanrahan Foundation

CAL FIRE

GRANTMAKING PROGRAM

Midpen is delighted for the opportunity to collaborate with community organizations, both long-standing and new, to support the vital role they play in connecting our communities to open space. In December 2023, Midpen awarded \$250,000 in funding to **five local community organizations** as part of our 2023 grantmaking program: Canopy, Grassroots Ecology, Saved By Nature, Tamien Nation and TOGETHER Bay Area. Planned projects and programs aim to bring nature within the reach of tribal communities and students from traditionally underserved communities. Other projects will foster connections and learning between groups, enhancing capacity for climate initiatives and resilience efforts and promote a better understanding of Indigenous land stewardship practices.



Saved by Nature



Together Bay Area



Tamien Nation



Canopy



Grassroots Ecology