Savings Open Space

People have been drawn to Bear Creek Redwoods for centuries. Its expansive views and cool, shaded forests made it a desirable South Bay property that was once slated to become a golf course and luxury estates. Formed by earthquakes and forest streams, and inhabited by Native Americans, loggers, wealthy estate owners, and even a religious institution, the property has been shaped by many forces and many hands throughout its history. Its beautiful and biologically rich ecosystem is home to hundreds of acres of redwood, providing the perfect habitat for many protected species. Instead of expensive homes and putting greens, local conservationists saw room to breathe, for plants, wildlife and people. Midpen, in partnership with Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST), Committee for Green Foils, and passionate citizens worked together to protect it as open space.

Your Measure AA Dollars at Work

Thanks to your support of Measure AA, Midpen has completed the first of several phased public access projects in a 20-year plan to restore Bear Creek Redwoods’ natural environment, providing a unique opportunity for you to connect with nature and discover local history. To view the preserve plan visit: www.openspace.org/bcrplan.

How to Get There

• Take Hwy. 17 to Bear Creek Road, opposite Lexington Reservoir.
• Going south (toward the ocean): go under the overpass, the road curves right onto Bear Creek Road. Take the stop sign.
• Going north (toward Los Gatos): take the overpass.
• From the stop sign, drive 1 mile. The parking lot is on the left.

Equestrian Parking Information

Limited equestrian parking is available through a permit at Bear Creek Stables. www.openspace.org/permits.

Aquatic Innovations

People began heavily altering this site’s natural water systems in the 1850s, when a logger named James S. Howe dammed Webb Creek and expanded Upper Lake — then a natural sag pond — into a millpond. Later, estate owner Dr. Harry L. Tevis increased the lake deeper and more round, and constructed cisterns, dams and pipes to store 11 million gallons of water to keep his gardens lush. Tevis also built water features for enjoyment; his estate boasted a massive aqueduct with an artificial waterfall, a swimming pool in a style Roman style and a lily pond for quiet reflection.

Restoring the Land

One of the biggest impacts of human activity is the displacement and degradation of native habitats and ecosystems. When Midpen acquired this land, it was far from pristine. Over 100 years of development and logging altered the original redwood and foothill habitats. Some of the physical changes are important to keep in the land’s story. Others, like the introduction of invasive species, are problems that Midpen has already started to resolve. And some — like fire-resistant, old-growth redwoods being replaced by more combustible brush and grasses — will take generations of active resource management to undo. Midpen is working to bring back the native landscape and biodiversity that once thrived on this land.

Highlights and Special Features

• One of the county’s best preserved, second-growth redwood forests, as well as extensive areas of Douglas fir forest and oak woodland. Several old-growth redwoods remain and are accessible from the trails.
• Remnants of a rich cultural history: a close-knit equestrian community at century-old Bear Creek Stables, millponds, magnificent estates and Alma College, the first Jesuit school of theology on the West Coast. The Alma College area is currently closed but will be opened in the future once safety improvements have been completed.
• Proximity to the San Andreas fault results in unique geology and landscape.
• How to mountain lions, black-tailed deer, coyotes, bobcats, song sparrows, mallard ducks, bullfrogs, western pond turtles, Townsend’s big eared bats, California myotis bats, Mexican free-tailed bats, Steller’s jays, Santa Cruz black salamanders, California giant salamanders, red-shouldered hawks, belted kingfishers, many migratory bird species and even sightings of bald eagles overhead!
• Native reptiles and amphibians

Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve is home to several species of native reptiles and amphibians. In Upper Lake, you might catch a glimpse of a western pond turtle basking on a floating platform. These turtles are threatened by habitat loss and the invasion of non-native competitors, such as red-eared slider turtles. You can tell the species apart by looking at their necks: red-eared sliders have a streak of red, but western pond turtles do not. Red-eared sliders are popular as pets; you can help protect natural ecosystems by never releasing pets into the wild. Amphibians as pets; you can help protect natural ecosystems and even sightings of bald eagles overhead!

Species Highlight

Bats like the Townsend’s big eared bat have a vital role in our ecosystem. They control agricultural moth pests (gypsy moth, brown apple moth), regulate insect populations, provide food sources for owls, snakes, hawks and raccoons, and distribute nutrients that act as fertilizers to help plants grow.

Exotic Versus Invasive Species

Native and nonnative plants grow alongside one another throughout this site. Some are remnants of the grand gardens that were planted during the estate and college periods. Others, like French broom and Eurasian blackberry, are invasive and must be carefully controlled to prevent damage to native habitats. Midpen has chosen to keep a few culturally significant ornamental plantings, while restoring native species across much of the site.

Tevis Roses

Dr. Harry L. Tevis was a dentist by training but a horticulturalist by trade. He worked alongside 43 full-time gardeners to grow crops, breed prize-winning blooms and experiment with rare and exotic plants. Tevis’ flower gardens included dahlias and lilies, but his favorite plants were roses — he cultivated 38 separate varieties. Tevis was generous by nature, often giving flowers and roses — he cultivated 38 separate varieties. Tevis was generous by nature, often giving flowers and roses — he cultivated 38 separate varieties. Tevis was generous by nature, often giving flowers and roses — he cultivated 38 separate varieties. Tevis was generous by nature, often giving flowers and roses — he cultured 38 separate varieties. Tevis was generous by nature, often giving flowers and roses — he cultured 38 separate varieties. Tevis was generous by nature, often giving flowers and roses — he cultured 38 separate varieties. Tevis was generous by nature, often giving flowers and roses — he cultured 38 separate varieties. Tevis was generous by nature, often giving flowers and roses — he cultured 38 separate varieties. Tevis was generous by nature, often giving flowers and roses — he cultured 38 separate varieties. Tevis was generous by nature, often giving flowers and roses — he cultured 38 separate varieties. Tevis was generous by nature, often giving flowers and roses — he cultured 38 separate varieties. Tevis was generous by nature, often giving flowers and roses — he cultured 38 separate varieties. Tevis was generous by nature, often giving flowers and roses — he cultured 38 separate varieties. Tevis was generous by nature, often giving flowers and roses — he cultured 38 separate varieties. Tevis was generous by nature, often giving flowers and roses — he cultured 38 separate varieties. Tevis was generous by nature, often giving flowers and roses — he cultured 38 separate varieties. Tevis was generous by nature, often giving flowers and roses — he cultured 38 separate varieties.

Partnerships and Collaborations

Preserving a regional greenbelt is hard work, and Midpen can’t do it alone. When a developer wanted to build a golf course and luxury homes here in the 1990s, organizations like Committee for Green Foils supported creating a preserve instead. Advocates sent letters, made phone calls and spoke at public meetings, voicing their concerns about environmental damage from the proposed development. Meanwhile, Midpen and POST worked together to buy the property so it could be protected in perpetuity. In 1999, thanks to state grants and generous private donations, Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve was created at last.

To learn more, visit our interactive story map: www.openspace.org/bcrstory