



David C. Daniels Nature Center

Skyline Ridge
Open Space Preserve



Daniels Nature Center

The nature center is one of a kind — the only one Midpen has built and operates to date. Conceptualized as early as 1985, built in 1995, and opened to the public in 1996, the nature center was funded in part by the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) in partnership with the David and Judy Daniels family in memory of their son David C. Daniels.

The focus of the nature center is to interpret the local flora, fauna, and cultural history of Skyline Ridge Preserve, with an emphasis on Alpine Pond. Pond mobiles hang from the ceiling to imaginatively depict the plants and animals that live at different depths in a pond.

There is a large-scale, hands-on exhibit that allows visitors to create a food web. Through completing the web, visitors explore the four natural communities, or habitats, surrounding the area just outside the nature center—grassland, mixed evergreen forest, chaparral, and riparian.



Photo: Liv Ames

Other features include a Skulls and Skins display, where children especially like to compare different animals and make observations. The nature center is also home to a live, captive-bred gopher snake.

Interpretive signs on the exterior wall of the nature center and adjacent to the building provide information on the Preserve's history, local wildlife, and an overview of the pond and its inhabitants. A 0.5-mile trail loops around Alpine Pond, providing visitors with an opportunity to enjoy a short, easy access hike.

Programs

Spaces & Species: Exploring Natural Communities

Spaces & Species is a unique environmental education field trip program based out of the nature center and surrounding trails of Skyline Ridge Preserve. Students have the opportunity to focus on the connections between themselves and the natural world, and begin to understand the importance and benefit of open space in their community.

- Spaces: natural environments that provide homes for wildlife and places of special significance to people.
- Species: all the different forms of life—mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians, plants, insects, bacteria, and micro-organisms that inhabit the Earth.

The overarching purpose of the Spaces & Species field trip is to help students develop an appreciation for and connection to the natural world through the powerful practice of scientific observation.

- This program is aligned with Next Generation Science Standards.
- Designed for 3rd-5th graders, 3rd grade recommended in the spring.
- The maximum group size is 32 students.
- Field trips are offered during the fall and spring on Tuesdays and Thursdays.
- The number of Spaces & Species field trips offered each season is contingent upon volunteer Outdoor Education Docent availability.
- There is no charge for a field trip.
- Four adult chaperones are required per class.
- Schools are responsible for providing transportation to the Preserve for a field trip. A reimbursement assistance fund has been established to offset transportation costs for qualifying (Title 1 or low income) schools.
- Reservations for field trips occur in fall and spring.

**For more information:
email docent@openspace.org**



Photo: Rosalina Calderon



In the Field

These four-to-five-hour field trips have three main components during which students explore, discover, and learn. Each school group is divided into smaller groups that rotate through the following activities:



Habitat Hike

Students investigate mixed evergreen forest, grassland, and chaparral communities to learn about ecological diversity, adaptation, and the relationships between plants, animals, and humans.



Pond Prowl

While adventuring around the shore of Alpine Pond, students explore for signs of wildlife and observe the special characteristics of a pond community.



Aquatic Laboratory

At the lab station, students investigate the macro-invertebrate life of Alpine Pond. The Outdoor Education Docents collect pond organisms for the children to study. Using microscopes, students identify aquatic insects, crustaceans, mollusks, a variety of plants, and more.



Volunteer Opportunities

Are you interested in sharing your knowledge and enthusiasm with others in a beautiful natural setting? The nature center offers two different volunteer opportunities. All necessary training is provided to be successful in these two programs. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate. For more ways to volunteer, visit: openspace.org/get-involved/volunteer

Outdoor Education Docents

Working in a team of four, volunteer Outdoor Education Docents (OED) facilitate and guide students on Spaces & Species field trips. Small group activities allow OEDs to engage students in hands-on discovery and nature inquiry in a fun and educational manner.

Nature Center Docent

As a Nature Center Docent (NCD), you host the facility, greet visitors, and orient them to Midpen, sharing natural history information, and providing pond study or wildlife viewing activities.

If you are interested in these programs, contact the Environmental Education Specialist at 650-691-1200 or by email at docent@openspace.org.

Hours of Operation

Weekends, generally from 12:00pm to 5:00pm, April through mid-October (11:00am to 4:00pm late October through mid-November). The nature center is open to the public free of charge and staffed by volunteer Nature Center Docents.

How to Get There

For convenient access to the nature center and Alpine Pond, park in the Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve parking area, located on the northwest corner of the Page Mill Road/Alpine Road and Skyline Boulevard (Highway 35) intersection (across Skyline Boulevard on the right). Walk through the tunnel under Alpine Road to reach the nature center.

**Want to see Alpine Pond from your home?
Check out the nature center webcam!**



Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

Midpen helps plants, animals and people thrive throughout the greater Santa Cruz Mountains region by preserving a connected greenbelt of more than 70,000 acres of public open space. These diverse and scenic landscapes, from bay wetlands to redwood forests and coastal grasslands, host an incredible diversity of life, helping make our region one of the world's biodiversity hotspots.

In Case of Emergency

If you experience an emergency on Midpen lands (fire, accident, or other immediate threat to life or property), call 911.

Contact Us

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