



Celebrating nearly 50 years of open space preservation and more than 5 years of Measure AA accomplishments

VIEWS

QUARTERLY NEWS ON PRESERVATION, RESTORATION AND PROGRAMS • FALL 2020

Photo Contest Winners Find Inspiration in Open Space

Now more than ever, people are seeking solace in nature. We received a record high of more than 500 submissions to our annual photo contest this year. After narrowing the field down to five finalists in each category, winners were chosen by a public vote on Facebook.

From lupines dancing in the wind, to the eyes of a doe and that magical golden-hour light, this year's winners share their moments of awe and wonder in Midpen preserves.



Eat Your Veggies

"The light that morning was soft and beautiful. This deer was happy and relaxed. When she looked at me with her big eyes and mouth busy munching those green leaves, I knew it would be a gorgeous portrait of her."

Elizabeth Yicheng Shen

Wildlife, Rancho San Antonio Preserve

(Continued on page 4)



A new San Francisco Bay Trail segment now open in Ravenswood Open Space Preserve

Mike Kahn/Midpen

New Bay Trail Connects Communities Enhanced Wetlands Support Rare Salt Marsh Wildlife

The newest section of the San Francisco Bay Trail is now open in Ravenswood Open Space Preserve. A trailhead at University Avenue in East Palo Alto connects local neighborhoods to the preserve, providing one of the most densely populated areas in the region with much-needed access to nearby nature. This small-but-mighty 0.6-mile new trail segment links more than 80 miles of continuous Bay Trail through seven cities—from Menlo Park to the north, Santa Clara to the south, and across the Dumbarton Bridge bike path to the East Bay. The easy-access trail offers opportunities for users of all abilities to immerse themselves in a unique bayland experience.

"This new trail provides a vital connection to nature for the community," Midpen General Manager Ana Ruiz said. "With just a short walk along the trail, you can quickly escape the buildings and traffic and enter a completely different world surrounded by nature, vast open views and the iconic San Francisco Bay. You can get right up to the water's edge and watch shorebirds take flight, see pickleweed

change color with the seasons and enjoy the bay breeze. Bicyclists can travel along the shoreline for miles, enjoying the Bay Trail for both recreation and as part of their commute."

To minimize impacts to the complex marshland ecosystem, Midpen designed much of the new trail as an elevated wooden boardwalk extending over the tidal uplands. In sensitive wetland areas, construction was limited to a short five-month window between September and January to avoid the breeding season of the endangered Ridgway's rail. All construction activities were contained within the narrow footprint of the boardwalk. To enhance the natural habitat, we added new refugia islands of gently sloping vegetated areas that rise above the existing marsh. These islands provide bayland wildlife with shelter during high tides.

Plan your visit or take a virtual tour at openspace.org/Ravenswood.



Ridgway's rail photo by Glenn Price

A Message from the General Manager



The Essential Nature of *Nature*

Across the Bay Area, our passion for nature is indisputable. We have come together as a nine-county Bay Area region to protect more than 1.4 million acres of land, setting in motion efforts to reclaim entire ecosystems, underscoring the value of habitat, biodiversity and wildlife linkages in protecting the quality of life for all living beings.


Here at Midpen, we spend a lot of time talking about conservation values to help community members understand how healthy watersheds ensure clean water, how thriving forests help clean the air, how grasslands promote biodiversity, how working lands create food security and how our ridgelines and shorelines may hold the keys to adapting to a changing climate.

Over the past six months, in light of the ongoing pandemic, we have been focusing our attention on how nature is critical for our mental, physical and emotional well-being. Our shelter-in-place orders put this very essential nature of *nature* front and center. As schools, businesses and sporting events shut down, outdoor open space was one of the few essential services that has remained open to all. For many, this provides an opportunity to reconnect to nature and take much needed respite in its healing powers.

Much research has been done over the past decade to quantify the health benefits of time spent in nature, beyond the benefits of exercising outdoors. Access to nature, according to the American Public Health Association, has been related to lower levels of mortality and illness, higher levels of outdoor physical activity, restoration from stress, a greater sense of well-being and greater social capital.

As our communities begin to open again, many are struggling with the fear, anxiety and tension of what that might mean. Time spent in nature can help reduce stress and worry. I know my family has relied on walks outside in nature to alleviate the angst, monotony and strain of staying home.

I cannot imagine what our community would be like without these special places providing green hills, shady forests, sweeping vistas and comforting signs of the changing seasons. In nature, you can experience a sense of normalcy listening to songbirds, glimpsing deer in a meadow or feeling the warmth of the sun as you hike along a ridgeline. I am grateful to be a part of an organization that offers all of us places to restore our health and well-being; places that give us comfort, renewed perspective and hope for what is possible.


Ana María Ruiz,
General Manager



Picchetti Ranch Open Space Preserve

Vedya Konda

Our mission:

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.

Our mission on the San Mateo County Coast:

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.

Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District Board of Directors

Board meetings are held on the second and fourth Wednesdays of each month at 7 p.m. Please visit openspace.org/board-meetings for details.

Pete Siemens, Ward 1 (Cupertino, Los Gatos, Monte Sereno, Saratoga)

Yoriko Kishimoto, Ward 2 (Cupertino, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, Palo Alto, Stanford, Sunnyvale) | **Jed Cyr, Ward 3** (Sunnyvale)

Curt Riffle, Ward 4 (Los Altos, Mountain View) | **Karen Holman, Ward 5** (East Palo Alto, Menlo Park, Palo Alto, Stanford)

Larry Hassett, Ward 6 (Atherton, La Honda, Menlo Park, Pescadero, Portola Valley, Redwood City, San Gregorio, Woodside)

Zoe Kersteen-Tucker, Ward 7 (El Granada, Half Moon Bay, Montara, Moss Beach, Redwood City, San Carlos, Woodside)

Ana María Ruiz—General Manager | Leigh Ann Gessner—Open Space Views Editor | Renée Fitzsimons—Outdoor Activities Editor





View from El Sereno Open Space Preserve towards Lexington Reservoir

Amanda Mills/Midpen

Preserving South Bay Hills for Watersheds, Wildlife and Trails

Midpen's mountainous El Sereno Open Space Preserve is more than a familiar scenic backdrop to Lexington Reservoir, Los Gatos and Saratoga. It is also critical watershed land with a 7-mile network of trails and opportunities for important new regional connections.

A look at the preserve map reveals a large keyhole-shaped gap in the middle, carved out as private land. Those 182 acres are owned by the San Jose Water Company, an investor-owned public utility. The Midpen board of directors recently approved the purchase of this inholding to make El Sereno Preserve whole and create connections with surrounding public lands for people and wildlife, while protecting the watershed. The sale is expected to finalize by September 30

for \$1,075,000. Midpen is working in partnership with the Peninsula Open Space Trust to try and secure California Wildlife Conservation Board grant funding to support this purchase.

This property helps capture, filter and release water into Los Gatos and Saratoga Creeks. The Bay Area Ridge Trail goes through El Sereno Preserve, and there are opportunities for expanded regional connections, including as part of Midpen's proposed Highway 17 Wildlife and Trail Crossing project currently undergoing environmental review.

Piece by piece, trail by trail, Midpen continues to preserve, restore and connect people to a greenbelt of public open space across the Santa Cruz Mountains region. 🌿



SJCC+CS crew member

Mike Kahn/Midpen



Native fern and sticky monkey flower grow in a restored area

Mike Kahn/Midpen

Restoration Making a Difference for Nature and People

After a lot of hard work on environmental restoration projects in Midpen preserves, our new collaboration with the San Jose Conservation Corps and Charter School (SJCC+CS) is yielding positive results for nature and people. The SJCC+CS provides high school curriculum and paid job training to local young adults between the ages of 18 and 27.

SJCC+CS crews have worked on several recent restoration projects in Midpen preserves. Crew members made great progress on removing thick stands of invasive jubata grass, French broom and English ivy from the forest understory at Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve.

"I was at one of the work sites recently and it's great to see the area changing from a monoculture of jubata grass to an open area with new growth of ferns, sticky monkey flower and redwood sprouts," Midpen Maintenance Supervisor Brendan Dolan said. "Their work is making a difference."

This summer, crews also removed invasive acacia trees from along an important fire access road in Miramontes Ridge Preserve.

"The crew members pour themselves into their work. They are eager to learn, and they always teach something new to me, too," said Midpen Ranger Marianne Chance, who arranges natural history and conservation career talks for the crews. "Our ultimate goal is to recruit some of the SJCC+CS crew members to be our coworkers at Midpen. In the meantime, this partnership provides us all with satisfying work, a great learning experience and lots of fun."

During collaborative projects before the COVID-19 pandemic, staff would arrange for crew members to experience what for many was their first time camping under the stars at Midpen's nearby Black Mountain Backpack Camp.

"The impact that it has on young people is lasting," SJCC+CS Operations Director Sal Muñoz said. "Being outside of their element in the preserves, they are able to have a different perspective. It builds the feeling that they can do something important with their hands by transforming the environment and transforming themselves." 🌿

Photo Contest Winners Find Inspiration in Open Space

(Continued from page 1)



Sky Lupines on the Ridge

"I like to stroll in the wilderness 'to lose my mind and find my soul' (John Muir). It was a beautiful moment. The wildflowers were dancing in the wind with the setting sun and cloud sea over the hills in the background. It felt like nature was playing a spring symphony."

Hongyan Liu

Plant life, Russian Ridge Preserve



Vibrance

"During shelter-in-place, we explored places that we have never been before and fell in love with Long Ridge Open Space Preserve. The sunset was stunning while the fog slowly came in.

***Nature gave us peace and joy**, and my daughter decided to do a happy jump right there!"*

Michelle Yau

People in Open Space, Long Ridge Preserve



One with Nature

"The big beautiful oak trees and the magnificent sunlight inspired me to take this photo. This photo reminds us how great nature is!"

Zoey Lim

Aspiring Photographers (students in grades 6-12),
Picchetti Ranch Preserve



Rolling Out the Green Carpet!

*"Once in a while I get to take the 'scenic route' home from work on my bike. On this particular day, the timing was right to catch the golden hour and when I got to this spot, it just looked like someone had rolled out a green carpet, winding up towards Mindego Hill—**magical!**"*

Larry Chow

Landscape, Russian Ridge Preserve

Coming soon, you can enjoy the majesty of Midpen preserve photos all year with our 2021 calendar (and, really, who can't wait to turn the page on 2020?). Stay tuned for announcements on availability, just in time for your holiday giving!

Outdoor Activities

FALL 2020 | September – October – November

Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve by Karl Gohl

MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT

explore nature

The transition from summer to fall signals changes in the environment: colors shift in the landscape, a crisp feeling fills the air, and sunsets arrive earlier. There is time for new opportunities, and a chance to reset our schedules and minds. This fall, communities are still adjusting to new realities in and outside of their homes due to the biological uncertainties of COVID-19. Communities are also acknowledging human social structures and systematic racism and engaging in conversations to shift awareness, increase understanding, and heal and improve society.

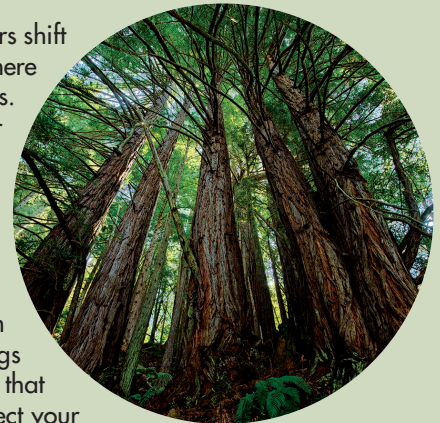
We are stronger when we stand together and work together to embrace adaptive and beneficial responses. This relates to visitation and use of Midpen preserves, where we are all encouraged to carry and wear face coverings when we pass one another on the trail, stay at least 6 feet away from others that are not part of our households, and avoid gathering in large groups to protect your health and that of other preserve users. We thank you for adopting these new ways of navigating open spaces and caring for one another.

Midpen Docent Naturalist-led outdoor activities were cancelled for the spring and summer to acclimate to COVID-19 changes. We remain hopeful that we will be able to offer limited activities this fall in a safe and modified way. All Docent Naturalist-led activities will require reservations to manage group size; electronic waiver signing in advance of activity; and electronic acceptance of activity terms, including wearing face covering and adherence to physical distancing guidelines. All applicable state and county public health mandates and Midpen guidelines are being monitored and will be adhered to for any public activity offerings. Other activity modifications may be specified and will be provided at openspace.org/activities. The webpage may also provide virtual engagement content soon. Be sure to check back regularly.

The Daniels Nature Center at Skyline Ridge Preserve, which normally would be hosting frequent seasonal visitation by families, hikers and cyclists remains closed at this time. A possible short season opening is being considered later this year for the nature center if all public health and Midpen directives allow for and support. Modified operations would also be in effect. Please check this webpage openspace.org/nature-center for updates. Our Docent Naturalists and Nature Center Docents continue to miss being able to engage with all of you and provide enriched experiences while sharing enjoyable time together in nature.

Take care, stay well, embrace resiliency and enjoy Midpen preserves safely. Please know we remain hopeful that our trails will merge again soon.

All the best,
Interpretation & Education Program Staff



openspace.org/activities

Photos from top: Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve by Karl Gohl, Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve by Randy Weber, and Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve by Jon Martin



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Wildland fire, preserve closure and COVID-19 updates and more at openspace.org

Connect with Us



Header photo on front Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve by Alex Song



Recher Panolpenti

Tips for Safely Finding the Trail Less Traveled

Midpen preserves are getting a lot of love these days. Our rangers report consistently high visitation as people seek safe, local outdoor spaces for the emotional and physical health benefits that time spent in nature provides. To avoid crowding and protect each other and the natural environment, here are tips for finding the trail less traveled:

Visit on weekdays: Monday through Thursday are less busy than Fridays and weekends.

Have a plan B: Have one or two alternate locations ready in case your destination is full.

Recreate responsibly: In addition to social distancing and wearing face coverings, play it safe by choosing low-impact activities, going slow and staying within your limits. We're seeing an increase in injuries and emergencies like cardiac arrest on the trails. Remember, the farther you go, the longer it will take emergency responders to reach you.

Find more tips at openspace.org/trail-tips and share your experiences with us by tagging [@MidpenOpenSpace](https://twitter.com/MidpenOpenSpace) on social media. 🦋

Historic Fall Harvests Preserved in Open Space

If you are relatively new to the area, it can be hard to envision what we now call Silicon Valley made up of abundant working lands—ranches, orchards, vineyards and cropland. Agriculture drove the local economy until the late 1960s.

As electronics, semiconductors and the internet waxed in the valley, food production waned. To find it today, you have to head south or west over the Santa Cruz Mountains to the San Mateo County Coast. Midpen and our nonprofit partner the Peninsula Open Space Trust are working to protect viable working lands that reflect this heritage, strengthen food security and provide local jobs. The disruption to our local food supply chain in the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic spotlighted the importance of a vibrant and resilient local foodshed.

Many Midpen preserves contain remnants of historical land use. One example that welcomes visitors each fall is a historic chestnut orchard in Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve. Its trees



Car Allen

A historic apple and pear orchard in Midpen's Saratoga Gap Open Space Preserve is harvested annually by volunteers to support local food banks

are believed to have been planted during the time of Spanish land grants in California.

Third-generation farmer Hans Johsens has an annual license with Midpen to manage the orchard and allow the public to gather and purchase chestnuts each fall. The orchard generally opens in early October when ripe chestnuts begin dropping from the trees, and closes when the crop is harvested, generally by mid-November. Visitors set out into the 20-acre orchard and gather the nuts, sometimes still in their prickly hulls, from the ground among fall leaves as generations have done before us.

Time spent gathering in the orchard, and the healthy nuts visitors take home to incorporate into their holiday meals, create real connections to nature, a local food supply and the Bay Area's agricultural heritage that still exists within our open space preserves. 🦋