



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

# VIEWS

QUARTERLY NEWS ON PRESERVATION, RESTORATION AND PROGRAMS • WINTER 2020

## Meeting Challenges with Three T's


Midpen Ranger Marianne Chance was one of our fire-trained staff who held the north line of the CZU August Lightning Complex Fire at Old Haul Road, preventing it from reaching Midpen preserves and communities along Skyline. This is her story.

**O**n the first day I was assigned to the fire, I had a fear of the unknown and a lot of questions. I had worked on prescribed burns and small fires, but I knew this would be hard. I took a deep breath and told myself I could handle it. That's tenacity. Sheer grit. It's a quality of Midpen staff.

As we prepared our equipment, a teammate who had already worked on the fire helped me calm down and understand I could do this. As we started working I said, "Don't leave me behind!" And they agreed that they wouldn't. That's teamwork.

Once we actually started fighting fire, my training and familiarity with the equipment kicked-in and made me more confident as we knocked down flare-ups as tall as a building at times. By day two, it all started to seem routine. That's training.

This past year has been one over-the-top event after another and we all rise to the challenge again and again. That's sheer strength of the human spirit. Fall back on your **training**, draw upon your **tenacity** and rely on your **team**. We're in this together.

Learn more about how we prevent, prepare for and respond to wildland fire at [openspace.org/fire](https://openspace.org/fire). 



Midpen Ranger Marianne Chance by Alysha Carabetta



Drone view of the trail corridor by Jackson Ricketts

## Saratoga-to-the-Skyline Opens Midpen Funds Portion of New Regional Trail



**T**he newly opened Saratoga-to-the-Skyline Trail provides hikers and equestrians with nearly 10 miles of new and existing trail, connecting Saratoga Quarry Park to Sanborn County Park and Castle Rock State Park. A portion of the new trail traverses San Jose Water Company land.

At Skyline Boulevard, the trail connects with the Bay Area Ridge Trail and California State Parks' Skyline-to-the-Sea Trail that winds 27 miles through Castle Rock and Big Basin Redwoods State Parks to the Pacific Ocean.

*(Note Trails are currently closed at Big Basin State Park due to damage from the CZU August Lightning Complex Fire.)*

"Even though this new trail is not on Midpen land, it's an integral part of our community-supported Vision Plan goal of creating a robust regional trail network," Midpen Assistant General Manager Brian Malone

said. "Ultimately, our goal is for 99% of residents living in Midpen's service area to have access to a regional trail within five miles of home. This new trail furthers that goal."

Midpen contributed \$1.365 million toward the Saratoga-to-the-Skyline Trail engineering design, environmental review and construction. This and 24 other Vision Plan projects are funded by Measure AA general obligation bonds, approved by voters in 2014.

Midpen has been a long-time supporter of connecting regional trails from Saratoga to the sea, a vision that is now realized. In 2011, we contributed \$250,000 to help the City of Saratoga purchase Quarry Park. We are thankful to have collaborated with the City of Saratoga, Santa Clara County Parks and San Jose Water Company on this project as, mile by mile, we work together to build a connected regional trail network for our community to enjoy.

For more information visit [openspace.org/Saratoga-trail](https://openspace.org/Saratoga-trail). 



## RESTORING WATERWAYS IN MIDPEN PRESERVES TO BENEFIT PLANTS, ANIMALS AND PEOPLE DOWNSTREAM

### Mindego Ranch Ponds

A single morning spent observing several spring-fed stock ponds that Midpen is restoring in the Mindego Ranch area of Russian Ridge Preserve makes evident the abundance of life these ponds support. Hawks circle surrounding grasslands, a great blue heron lifts skyward, American coots scud across open water and a rare California red-legged frog basks in the morning sun.

“Stock pond habitats like these are one of the few remaining water features in the Santa Cruz Mountains where California red-legged frogs are still present,” Midpen biologist Matt Sharp Chaney said.

This winter, he and other staff are monitoring these newly restored ponds, which were created by ranchers in the past

and are now a critical refuge for the survival of rare native wildlife into the future.

“I’ve never encountered California red-legged frog breeding activity in this specific pond,” Sharp Chaney said from the shore of Upper Springs Pond that has been deepened to provide year-round water and new open water habitat while carefully retaining appropriate native vegetation. “It would make me very happy to find an egg mass here.”

Sharp Chaney expects the threatened California red-legged frog to benefit from these projects, along with one of their predators, the endangered San Francisco garter snake. A 2017 U.S. Geological Survey study at Mindego Ranch recommended enhancing the stock ponds for California red-legged frogs to support

the area’s San Francisco garter snake population. The study also recommended grazing as a land management tool for maintaining the surrounding open grasslands that San Francisco garter snakes and many other native wildlife need to survive.

Through Midpen’s conservation grazing program, cattle at Mindego Ranch now play a role in improving grasslands and sustaining biodiversity, alongside efforts such as ongoing manual removal of nonnative thistles. Wildlife-friendly fencing allows Midpen staff to control cattle access to the restored ponds while providing cattle with water through strategically located troughs, allowing conservation grazing to be focused to where it is most beneficial.

We are eager to see the plants and wildlife at Mindego Ranch surviving and thriving in response to our continued care of its rich mosaic of habitats. 🦋





**Lobitos Creek Watershed**

As Purisima Creek Redwoods Preserve has been expanded west toward the San Mateo County Coast in recent years, Midpen is now protecting a majority of the Lobitos Creek Watershed. This landscape contains several abandoned oil wells, drilled around 1930 and later, that Midpen is working to clean up and decommission to protect the surrounding natural environment. Oil wells must be properly decommissioned to prevent hydrocarbons or other contaminants from migrating into the drinking water or to the surface. Currently, engineers are developing a decommissioning plan and obtaining the required permits.

“Stock pond habitats like these are one of the few remaining water features in the Santa Cruz Mountains where California red-legged frogs are still present.”

—Matt Sharp Chaney, Midpen biologist

*Photos clockwise from top left: Mindego Lake with American coots in Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve, Leigh Ann Gessner/Midpen; Oilfield in Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve; Dump cleanup near Madonna Creek in Miramontes Ridge Open Space Preserve, Aaron Hebert/Midpen; California red-legged frog, Matt Sharp Chaney/Midpen; Midpen biologist Matt Sharp Chaney at the newly restored Knuedler Lake where California red-legged frogs are present in Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve, Leigh Ann Gessner/Midpen; Baby San Francisco garter snake, Matt Sharp Chaney/Midpen*



**Madonna Creek**

In Miramontes Ridge Preserve above Half Moon Bay, Midpen has protected water quality in Madonna Creek by recently completing the removal of an old ranch dump from the 1960s that was discovered near the creek channel. The dump contained car parts, household appliances, concrete and tires. The primary concern, and most challenging aspect of the project, was removing soil contaminated with lead, petroleum and metals to prevent it from leaching into the groundwater and the adjacent creek. Along Madonna Creek, Midpen has future plans to partner with the San Mateo County Resource Conservation District on a Measure AA-supported project to remove an old dam that is a barrier to steelhead trout and salmon.



## A Message from the General Manager



Ana María Ruiz

# Lessons from Nature

Soon, we will turn the page on 2020. For most of us, that can't happen soon enough as we reckon with the undeniable human and economic impacts caused by the worldwide pandemic. The CZU August Lightning Complex and other Bay Area fires added another layer of shock and grief. Finding our way forward, in search of restoration and revival, requires that we take stock of what has occurred, and how our lives have shifted to help us regroup and forge a new path.

Although this is undoubtedly a difficult time in human history, it is important to remember that nothing is static. Nature reminds us of this fact. Viewed from nature's endless horizon, this is only a moment in time, with a long history of events in the past and many more to occur in the future. That we are in a constant state of change is one of nature's lessons.

If we are open, there is plenty nature can teach us as we look to a more hopeful and optimistic future.

**Like nature, we do better when we are connected.** Together, we have successfully conserved more than 1.3 million acres of open space lands throughout the Bay Area. Now the task before us is to connect these lands through linkages and corridors, allowing wildlife and plants to move safely across landscapes. As humans, we too need avenues for connection. Although we are currently unable to be physically near each other, we are relying on new tools to seek connection – whether it be video conferencing, waving to each other from a distance, or observing how others enjoy the same open spaces we cherish. Our connections may look a bit different at the moment, yet they are nonetheless critical in helping each other overcome challenges and move safely across our own landscapes.

**Nature heals quickly under the right conditions.** While the beloved redwoods at Big Basin State Park were damaged by the CZU August Lightning Complex Fire, already there are reports of vegetation resprouting and wildlife returning. Although disruptive, fire is a natural part of the redwood forest ecosystem and the forests of Big Basin have burned many times during the past millennia. The iconic “Mother” and “Father” old-growth redwoods remain standing and we are optimistic that they and other surviving old-growth trees will thrive again. As a part of nature, we humans are also able to recover from disruptive events. With the right support and systems in place, we can lift each other up to thrive as a whole community.

**The natural world transforms and adapts.** Nature is ever evolving. Seasons shift, trees grow, flowers bloom, leaves drop, seeds resow and water flows. While the changes we have witnessed in 2020 have been sudden and unsettling, when contemplated through the lens of nature's ever-transitioning systems, everything appears more manageable. When we look to nature, we are reminded that as a part of nature, we too have the ability to readjust, recover and renew.

**Nature can be part of the solution.** Many of us have taken advantage of this time to find moments to slow down and reconnect with nature. Spending time each day outside surrounded by the sights, sounds and smells of nature provides real benefits to our physical and emotional well-being. Just as fire returns nutrients to the soil and stimulates the growth of redwoods and other plants, we can turn to nature to recharge and revive within us the hope, tenacity and ingenuity that keeps us moving forward.

Thankfully, we have each other and our natural open spaces to support our collective path to a better future.



Ravenswood Open Space Preserve by Mike Kahn/Midpen

### 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](https://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)

COVID-SAFE AND VIRTUAL

# Outdoor Activities

WINTER 2020-2021 | December – January – February

Deer, Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve by Chris Tracey

MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT

explore nature

Welcoming winter is on the minds of many, with wishes for rain and rejuvenation all interwoven into the change of seasons. Autumn's early promise of docent naturalist-led activities and reopening of the Daniels Nature Center did not manifest. This year's unprecedented wildfire impacts to people and places and ongoing COVID-19 uncertainties have delayed the process of bringing in-person engagement back to the preserves. In the meantime, we hope you have found time to be out in nature, enjoying your favorite Midpen trails and observing best practices of distancing, wearing face coverings and adhering to other guidelines.

To stay connected, we continue to use social media to bring virtual nature experiences to your homes. Be sure to check out [openspace.org/virtual-nature](https://www.openspace.org/virtual-nature) and follow Midpen on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn to see what we are up to and to stay in touch through the winter season.

Please continue to refer to Midpen's website and in particular the [openspace.org/activities](https://www.openspace.org/activities) page for any updates and any guided activity postings that may yet be realized! We are hopeful and eager to see the new year bring us back together to observe nature's resilience in response to 2020's challenges.

[openspace.org/activities](https://www.openspace.org/activities)

All the best,  
Interpretation & Education Program Staff

## Winter Wonders

The return of rain brings many dormant plants and animals to life and the mild Bay Area climate provides refuge for visiting birds. Here are a few native plants and animals to observe on your adventures.



### December

#### California newts journeying

Winter rains bring these salamanders out of summer dormancy to journey to ponds and creeks where they reproduce.

Photo by Bob Stronck



### January

#### Cedar waxwings feasting

Bright red toyon berries are an important winter food source for birds such as cedar waxwings, which overwinter here in large social flocks.

Photo by Aaron Arul



### February

#### Redwood violets blooming

This plant's diminutive flowers are not violet at all, but brilliant yellow bringing spots of color to the damp forest understory in late winter.

Photo by Doris Livezey

Get help identifying your winter nature observations and contribute them to science by using the California Academy of Science's free iNaturalist app.



## Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

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Header photo on front by Charles Tu

## Holiday Gift Ideas from Midpen

From mountain lion facemasks to a brand new 2021 Midpen calendar, our online store has great items for all your holiday giving!



[openspace.org/holiday](https://openspace.org/holiday)

## Midpen Grant Program Supports Equity in Access to Nature

lifelong connections to nature are often kindled in childhood, however, some of today's youth have few opportunities to explore and experience undeveloped natural landscapes. A funding recipient of Midpen's new grantmaking program, Vida Verde Nature Education, is working to change that.



A student finds connection in a city park by Vida Verde

This San Gregorio-based nonprofit promotes equitable access to nature and environmental education by providing free overnight experiences for youth from low-income neighborhoods within the San Mateo County Coast and greater Bay Area communities. Vida Verde's teachers design their programs to provide tools and experiences that help students heal, build community and grow through essential exposure to nature.

"Vida Verde has so many powerful moments. My favorite are always the bonds that my students create with the Vida Verde instructors," East Oakland Pride Elementary teacher Nelly Alcantar said. "Sometimes, our students' daily lives are absent of caring and empathic adults. Vida Verde instructors show so much love, empathy and patience to our students that the kids find a new respect for adults. Trust seems finally possible in their eyes. That is a life-changing experience that will change their outlook on life, school and possibilities."

The grant from Midpen helped Vida Verde staff launch week-long nature programs (modified for COVID-19 safety) throughout the fall, including in-person outdoor activities at local parks, guided family hikes, self-guided family camping and Zoom discussions with a mix of live activities and nature videos.

Midpen's grantmaking program began in 2019, providing funds to seven local nonprofit and research organizations, including Vida Verde. The grantmaking program allows Midpen to support and strengthen our partnerships with local organizations that further community-wide understanding and protection of the natural world and provide people of all ages with outdoor access and interpretive and educational experiences.

Learn more at [openspace.org/grantmaking-program](https://openspace.org/grantmaking-program).

