

SIERRA AZUL/BEAR CREEK REDWOODS OPEN SPACE PRESERVES MASTER PLAN PROJECT

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

PLANNING PROCESS

1. What is the process for developing and approving the Master Plan?

The District's Planning Department is leading a comprehensive planning process to develop the Sierra Azul/Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserves Master Plan. In the end, the process will establish a vision, set policies, and identify implementation projects for resource protection, land management, and public access for the District's two southernmost Preserves that are consistent with the District's 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.”

The Master Plan project includes the following key milestones, and is expected to be completed in late 2007:

1. **Information Gathering and Fieldwork:** *site orientation; resource inventory and data collection; stakeholder interviews*
2. **Existing Conditions:** *additional data collection & field reconnaissance; Knowledge Exchange Public Workshop; identify stakeholder issues; hold public site tours & focus group meetings*
3. **Challenges and Opportunities:** *analyze challenges and opportunities; public informational booth; Challenges and Opportunities Public Workshop*
4. **Plan Alternatives:** *develop plan alternatives; Alternatives Public Workshop*
5. **Draft Plan Preparation:** *develop plan policies and guidelines; environmental impact analysis and mitigation; Draft Plan Public Workshop*
6. **Final Plan Approval:** *prepare final plan; Final Plan Public Hearing*

2. Aside from providing initial public input, what are other ways in which the public can participate in the master plan process?

There are a number of opportunities for the public to continue participating in the Master Plan project. The District will be hosting future workshops throughout the process, including a third workshop in December where we will present preliminary alternative concepts for public review and feedback. Also, we encourage folks to continuously visit the project website to review the latest project information; new information is frequently posted.

3. *From the time that the master plan is approved, what is the approximate overall timeframe for opening the new trails and staging areas to the public? What consideration is being given to a phased-opening plan?*

An implementation plan that specifies the priorities and proper sequence of new public access projects, including new trails and staging areas, will be a component of the Master Plan document. The implementation plan will include information on the expected timeframe, responsible lead departments and partnering agencies, and potential funding sources for each new access facility. The Master Plan will identify immediate (1 year or less), short-term (1-5 years), mid-term (5-15 years), and long-term (15-20 years) projects for each Preserve.

NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION AND PRESERVATION

1. *When will the District publish the results of the flora and fauna surveys conducted in the Preserves?*

Natural resources information for Bear Creek Redwoods and Sierra Azul Open Space Preserves are available for public review online, please download our various thematic maps by clicking the following website:

http://www.openspace.org/plans_projects/sierra_azul_bear_creek_mp_download.asp

2. *How does the District determine the level of public access to sensitive resource areas, such as areas containing endangered species or archeological artifacts?*

The District's mission includes the need to protect and restore the natural environment. Sensitive resources such as special status species habitats and historical landscapes are part of the natural environment. The District weighs the sensitivity of each resource and considers the potential impacts to the resource resulting from public use to determine the level of public access to sensitive sites.

ACCESS AND EASEMENTS

1. *What are the concerns regarding access to the Preserves from Summit Road and Highland Road?*

Access to the Preserves from Summit Road and Highland Road is limited at this time due to intervening private land and private ownership of portions of the access road that leads to interior Preserve trails. The District would need approval from the private landowners to allow the public to use these roads. Alternatively, if site conditions allow, a trail alignment that circumvents private property may be considered as part of the Master Plan to open new trail connections.

2. *What access points into Bear Creek Redwoods are being considered from Summit Road?*

A potential access point from Summit Road into Bear Creek Redwoods is located near the Bear Creek Road and Summit Road intersection, in the vicinity of the former Christmas Tree Farm. The site is fairly level, located near two major roadways, and has

been previously disturbed. However, intervening private property poses a major challenge that may preclude the ability to connect Summit Road to the interior Preserve trail system.

3. *Can the access problems to Mt. Umunhum be solved?*

A number of outstanding issues need to be resolved before public access to Mt. Umunhum is possible. First, the onsite contamination and the public safety hazards need to be removed or safely contained. To this end, the U.S. Department of Defense is currently conducting subsurface investigations to determine if any below ground remediation is needed including removal of underground fuel tanks. The District is also concerned about the buildings that remain on the site, since many contain asbestos and materials coated with lead-based paint. The structural integrity of these structures, including the monolith, is also questionable given previous seismic damage. The use restrictions for the sections of Mt. Umunhum Road that are owned in fee by private landowners also pose a challenge for public access.

4. *Will San Jose Water Company allow access to Mt. Umunhum from Wrights Station Road?*

The District continues to invite San Jose Water Company to engage in a dialogue to identify potential trail connections from Summit Road to Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve through San Jose Water land. As a private landowner, San Jose Water Company retains its prerogative to allow or restrict public use through their property.

5. *Would the District consider opening trailheads that are located across the street from parking areas? For example, would it be possible to access the western trails at Bear Creek Redwoods from a potential parking area located on the opposite side of Bear Creek Road?*

The District will evaluate the trail use opportunities of new trailheads and consider potential public safety and nuisance issues to determine whether a new trailhead located across the road from a staging area is appropriate.

6. *In the interim period before the master plan is approved and implemented, is any consideration being given to expanding the use in areas covered by the current Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve permit process, or creating a permit process for the closed areas in Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve (such as the Rancho de Guadalupe area)?*

At this time, the District is not considering opening closed areas of Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve to public use or expanding the existing permitted area at Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve. Although the District appreciates the public's interest to open lands as soon as possible, as stewards of natural open spaces, the District has a responsibility to protect these resources and to adequately and comprehensively plan the expansion of public use so as to not compromise or negatively impact the natural resources or native habitat.

TRAIL USE POLICIES AND GUIDELINES

1. Does the District have any formal guidelines or policies with respect to multi-use trails?

In 1990, the District's Board of Directors adopted Trail Use Policies (last amended in 2000) to guide trail use designations to promote safe and enjoyable experiences for all who use the District lands. In 1993, the Board of Directors adopted Trail Use Guidelines and Mitigation Measures to provide additional guidance in trail design to help implement the Trail Use Policies and reduce trail use conflicts. These guidelines include information on trail use constraints and opportunities and trail class designations.

2. Does the District have any safety related data or accident statistics, which help guide policy?

The Board of Directors receive monthly, annual, and multi-year comparative summary reports on emergency accidents and enforcement actions as reflections of serious activities that occur on District lands. These reports include information on emergency responses, criminal activity, mutual aid incidents, and written ordinance violations. The Board of Directors has considered the information in these reports to help policy.

3. Where visibility on trails is limited, is it possible to create bypasses for horses and hikers?

The terrain, the sensitivity of the surrounding natural resources, and the intent of the trail typically dictate the allowable width of new trails. If a new trail has minimal vertical and horizontal clearance, the uses allowed on the trail are constrained to prevent user conflicts; typically these trails are open to hiking use only. Multi-use trails are typically wider (more than 4 feet wide) to allow trail users to pass one another without requiring one trail user to step off the trail. The wider tread also avoids the need to create bypasses, since the width is constant throughout the length of the trail. On all trails, the District stresses the use of proper trail etiquette to safely pass others (please refer to our Trail Etiquette brochure).

BEAR CREEK STABLES AND EQUESTRIAN USE

1. What concerns does the District have about retaining Bear Creek Stables as an active, ongoing horse-boarding facility?

The District is concerned about the potential impacts to the natural resources, especially water quality of streams in the vicinity of the stables, degradation of grasslands and meadows resulting in soil erosion due to overgrazing.

2. What potential public benefits can the District envision if it is allowed to continue operating? What changes would the District like to see?

The benefits from the stables operation and any changes that are identified for this facility will be determined as part of the master planning process.

3. Is equestrian use considered low-intensity? Are the Bear Creek Stables considered a low-intensity use?

Low intensity uses avoid concentration of use, significant alteration of the land, and significant impacts on the natural resources. Hiking, mountain biking, and equestrian use are considered low intensity uses. A stables operation requires a much higher degree of surface development to provide equestrian facilities such as corrals, paddocks, barns, storage facilities, parking, and arenas. Also, a stables operation by its very nature concentrates use by providing shelter and facilities for horses and equestrians. For these reasons, a stables operation is considered an accessory use and not a low intensity use.

DOG USE

1. What are the District's concerns about allowing dog access at Bear Creek Redwoods?

The District is concerned about the potential environmental impacts that may result if Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve is open to dogs and the level of compatibility of dog use with the existing conditions and other uses proposed for the Preserve. The District will carefully evaluate these issues when determining the suitability of allowing dogs at the Preserve.

2. What are the criteria the District uses to determine whether dog access will be allowed in open space preserves?

In 1995, the District's Board of Directors approved a series of site evaluation criteria for dog access to guide decisions on where to allow dog access in District Preserves. The criteria include habitat sensitivity, level of pre-existing disturbance, a pre-existing history of dog use, and accessibility to loop trails and facilities (refer to Dog Access Site Evaluation Criteria).

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND OUTREACH

1. How has the District conducted outreach and education about the Master Plan?

The District values community involvement and has made significant outreach efforts despite limited staff resources. We have actively engaged the public by: holding public meetings and focus groups with various user groups, collecting input through questionnaires, offering site tours of closed areas, staffing an informational booth at the Los Gatos Farmer's Market, sending project notices via mail, and updating the project website. This outreach has resulted in a wealth of information from the public, which will now be compiled and analyzed with the resource data that we have collected for each Preserve. The District will present Plan Alternatives in December. The Draft Plan and Final Plan will also be presented to the public at future public meetings.

2. *Was the first public workshop advertised or announced in the San Jose Mercury News and other local daily newspapers?*

The District prepared a Press Release to announce the first public workshop that was sent to daily and weekly local newspapers including the San Jose Mercury News. The information was also posted on the District's website and mailed meeting notices to more than 3,000 neighbors and interested persons.

3. *How can the public help expand public access to the Preserves in a responsible and timely fashion?*

The District encourages interested members of the public to participate in the Master Plan project by attending public workshops, submitting comments, and participating in project activities. The upcoming public workshops will provide the public with opportunities to become informed of the planning process, understand the challenges and opportunities for public access, and submit input on the issues and the desires for resource protection, land management, and use. Once the Master Plan is approved, the public can further assist the District during plan implementation by participating in volunteer activities to restore habitat, repair facilities, and expand public access.

4. *How can members of the community help further the District's mission?*

The District encourages members of the community to actively support our mission by: attending Board meetings, volunteering, and making tax-deductible donations. Visit our website www.openspace.org to learn more.

5. *What enforcement authority do volunteers have when patrolling trails on behalf of the District?*

The District offers Volunteer Trail Patrol opportunities whereby the public can help further the District's mission by monitoring and reporting trail conditions and hazards, providing visitors with trail use information, and educating visitors on trail safety and etiquette. Volunteers possess no enforcement authority and are asked to only approach visitors who seek assistance or who are willing to listen.

6. *Can we, as the public, help the District lobby for federal and/or state resources to implement the cleanup of Mt. Umunhum? How can we help?*

Yes. We encourage the public to become part of the *Friends of Mt. Umunhum* group that the District has organized. We continue to collect contact information from people who are interested in drafting letters of support for the cleanup, or supporting the project in other possible ways. A letter writing campaign may be necessary in the following year. The District will also inform *Friends* members of upcoming Mt. Umunhum events and tours as a way to maintain strong support and visibility for the cleanup movement.

PROPERTY INFORMATION

1. *What is the current status of the former military base on the summit of Mt Umunhum?*

The District purchased the former Almaden Air Force Base located on the summit of Mt. Umunhum in 1986 from the United States Army, which maintained an active base from 1957 to the early 1980s. Although the District is the current landowner of the property, the Department of Defense (DoD) is responsible for the contamination and remediation of the site, which is listed as a Formerly Used Defense Site (FUDS). The Army is the executive agent for the FUDS program and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is the organization that manages and directs the program's administration.

2. *What is the status of the parcel east of the Christmas Tree Farm on Summit Road (APN 54450002)?*

The parcel remains under private ownership.

3. *What is the status of the Moody Gulch property, and are access and trail policies within this land being considered as part of the master plan?*

Moody Gulch is currently under Santa Clara County ownership. Since the property is considered public land, the Master Plan is considering trail connections to the property, which may function as a gateway into Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve for residents of Redwood Estates .

MISCELLANEOUS

1. *How are trails named?*

The District's Board of Directors approved a policy for Site Naming and Gift Recognition in 1993 (last amended in 2001) that specifies how Preserve trails are named. Preserve trails are ordinarily named after geographical, botanical, or zoological features or historical persons (not living), uses, or events associated with the site, or significant deceased supporters of open space.

2. *Are logging operations within the Preserves now completed?*

Yes. Prior to the District's acquisition of Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve, Big Creek Lumber, a local logging company, purchased the timber rights on the property. The District did not initiate the logging activities at Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve and has no intention of initiating any future logging activities on this property.

3. *Would the District consider recommending a local history interpretive center in the master plan and would an interpretive center be consistent with the mission of the District?*

Part of the District's mission, to "provide opportunities for ecologically sensitive public enjoyment and education" supports new opportunities for ecological interpretation. To this end, the District provides docent-led and self-guided interpretive hikes and operates the Daniels Nature Center at Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve, which is a small interpretive facility that showcases the local flora and fauna. The Master Plan project is considering a new interpretive facility that interprets the history and natural resources at

Sierra Azul or Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserves. Establishing an interpretive facility would be contingent on securing outside funding.

4. *What types of use are under consideration for the former Alma College buildings? Are any of the buildings considered salvageable?*

The existing geologic conditions that underlie the former Alma College Complex significantly constrain the future use of these structures. The buildings lie within the Alquist-Priolo Zone, within 500 feet from the San Andreas Fault, and less than 200 feet from fault traces. As a result, the area has the potential to suffer violent seismic shaking, ground rupture failures and lateral ground displacement during a major earthquake. Retrofitting or relocating the buildings may be cost prohibitive unless the District is able to secure significant grants and donations. As part of the Master Plan process, the District is also conducting a historical resources analysis of this site to help determine the feasibility for use of the existing Alma College buildings.

5. *How does the District plan to handle the potential need for additional rangers and maintenance?*

The District does not anticipate a significant increase in visitation at Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve. Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve, however, may experience a marked increase in use once it is opened to the public. The District budgeted for two new ranger positions in 2005 to provide additional ranger patrol, emergency response, and maintenance. Also, the District is considering locating a new satellite field office at one of these two Preserves. The new office would increase ranger presence, house maintenance equipment, and serve as an emergency command center for the southern area of the District.

6. *What is the District's relationship with San Jose Water Company?*

San Jose Water Company is a private water company with vast amounts of property located adjacent to Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve. As with any other private landowner who owns property adjacent to the Preserves, the District encourages San Jose Water Company to be actively involved in the Master Plan project.