

MOUNTAIN OPEN SPACE STEWARDS (MOSS) COMMUNITY PETITION:

SIERRA AZUL & BEAR CREEK REDWOODS MASTER PLAN

*Go into the mountains and get their glad tidings.
Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees.
- John Muir*

Introduction

We appreciate this opportunity to share our views with the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District.

The Mountain Open Space Stewards (MOSS) is a group of responsible, environmentally sensitive and community-oriented citizens residing in the mountain neighborhoods surrounding Sierra Azul and Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserves (Preserves). Local residents have joined together in a community-wide effort to contribute our knowledge, wishes, concerns and talents to Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District as you undertake this important mission to create a master plan for these Preserves. We view this as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to help shape the long-term protection, public appreciation and enjoyment of these 18,000+ acres of land within our community.

Because these Preserves are adjacent to or within a short distance of many of our own back yards, we are passionately committed to being part of the community-based planning process. As residents of the neighborhoods most impacted by any changes to the Preserves, we endorse the mission of the District to balance recreational access that is low intensity with careful protection of natural resources. After all, we love this land. The landscape of these Preserves is the landscape of our own homes.

Acknowledgements

We'd like to acknowledge the efforts already made by the District to reach out to our community and respond to our requests. In particular, as the Project Manager, Ana Ruiz has been helpful, thoughtful and encouraging of our participation. We appreciate her including some of us among the initial stakeholder interviews, initiating the Public Tours, ensuring that the

project announcement newsletter was sent throughout our community, providing us with detailed site data, and now meeting with us as a focus group.

We'd also like to acknowledge Pete Siemens, our Ward 1 representative on the Board of Directors, who placed himself in the line of fire at a recent well-attended MOSS meeting full of concerned constituents. He managed to answer a large number of questions and reassure the community that the District's "Good Neighbor" policy is not just words.

These experiences, combined with the District's reputation as responsible land stewards, lead us to be cautiously optimistic that the District will sincerely seek to address our concerns and wishes.

Who is MOSS and Where Do We Live?

We are mountain residents living within the 95033 region, known as the Los Gatos Mountains. We are people who care about local open space issues. We are local hikers, equestrians, mountain bikers, trail runners, dog-owners, historians, teachers, parents, amateur and professional naturalists, native plant enthusiasts and leaders in the mountain community. Our members include:

- Publisher, Mountain Network News
- President, Citizens for Responsible Forest Management (CRFM)
- Member of Executive Committee, Sierra Club Ventana Chapter
- Founder, Mountain History Study Group
- President, Santa Cruz County Horseman's Association
- Owner, Bear Creek Stables
- Founder, Mountain Resource Group
- Board member, Redwood Mutual Water Company
- Docent, Big Basin Redwoods State Park

We participate actively in the life of our mountain community, and contribute time and financial resources to environmental causes.

We now number more than 70 members, and are still growing. Many members of MOSS have lived in these mountains for decades. We have watched the landscape change drastically in the last 20 years and are committed to seeing the preservation of this beautiful landscape for our children and grandchildren to enjoy. Regardless of tenure, we all are committed to an active and responsible stewardship of our open spaces.

What Can MOSS Do for the District and the Preserves?

MOSS members have already committed to being actively involved in the development and implementation of the Plan, as well as ongoing maintenance and interpretive activities within the Preserves. In response

to a questionnaire we created, over 90% of MOSS members were willing to volunteer their time. These were the top vote-getters:

- Trail creation and maintenance
- Habitat restoration - exotic plant removal (broom, thistle, ivy) and native plant restoration
- Trail patrol on horseback or mountain bike
- Docent and interpretive functions
- Local historical knowledge and artifacts
- Creative problem-solving, e.g. multi-use trail policy
- Fundraising, particularly for trail development
- Political lobbying, particularly for Mt Umunhum cleanup
- Acting as local "eyes" and "ears" (wildfire, illegal activity etc.)

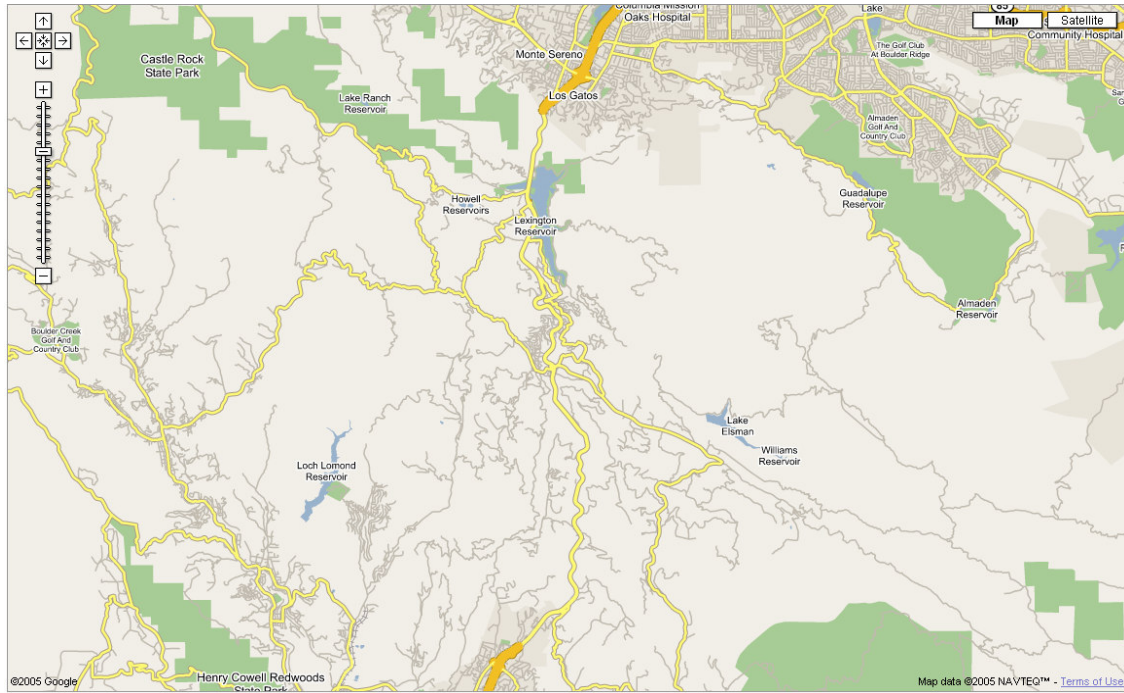
We are confident that our group can be a valuable asset to the District. Because we live here, many of us are deeply familiar with the plants, animals, seasons and cycles, such as the seasonal changes of the madrone tree, the varieties of ferns, or the many unique qualities of the sequoia sempervirens. We are experts at identifying and removing non-native invasive plants, and some of us have built trails. We have a deep historical knowledge of the region. Since our members are committed to their lives in the mountains, we possess the skill and experience required to fulfill all of these functions.

Overview of Key Community Issues

After attending the first public Workshop offered by the District and participating in the tours of various regions organized by Ana Ruiz, the group has held a number of meetings to share information and outline our concerns and suggestions for the Master Plan. In summary, these are the key issues representing a broad consensus within our community:

- ✦ **Neighborhood Access**— The most passionate desire within our community is for convenient access to these Preserves. Because our community was settled initially in the 1800's, most parcels of land have fallen by now into private hands. Over the past few decades, many formerly-accessible old logging roads, deer trails, meadows and forests have now become gated, fenced and unavailable for public use. Some of us grew up here and can remember riding horses for miles in any direction; that has sadly disappeared. There no longer are significant open space lands or trails readily-available to our summit-area neighborhoods. (This phenomenon helps us appreciate the tremendous importance of the work done by the District, to save open space lands before they disappear forever.)

This map illustrates the lack of public open space in the Summit/Skyline region south of Sanborn-Skyline County Park:



Thus our excitement about the potential for ready-access to Bear Creek Redwoods and Sierra Azul. Some of us actually share property boundaries and private roads with these Preserves, and for many of us it **could** be possible to enjoy the Preserves on foot, bike or horseback without the need to drive a car, pollute the air, contribute to traffic or require parking. If a drive is necessary, it could be a short one that does not require driving down to the valley. We have developed a set of suggestions for access and staging points from within our community that would be most desirable.

✦ **Multi-use trails**—Many of our group members are both hikers and bikers, or bikers that also run trails and ride horses. A great number of us own dogs. When one couple rides trails together, she's on horseback and he's on a mountain bike. We have decided as a group that multi-use access to both Preserves is critical. While we recognize the significant challenges associated with creating and managing a multi-use trail network, we believe that "where there's a will, there's a way". Every member of our group is committed to sharing the trails fairly, and we have spent a considerable amount of time brainstorming strategies for managing common trail conflict issues. Several of us have also previously been involved with

successful multi-use trail planning efforts.

- ✦ **Privacy, Security and Traffic** —We are aware that opening up these lands to public use can produce certain issues such as increased risk of fire, crime and traffic. We'd like the District to consider measures for mitigating these risks. In addition, the planning of access points should not infringe unduly on the privacy of residents in the immediate area surrounding trail access.
- ✦ **Stables**— Our community strongly supports the preservation of Bear Creek Stables as an active, ongoing horse-boarding facility. Some local residents recall boarding their horses at Bear Creek Stables many decades ago. It would be a shame to lose this link to the recreational activities and traditions of Bear Creek's historic past, especially in fast-moving Silicon Valley. Even many non-equestrians in our group see broad community benefits. We'd like the District to negotiate a long-term lease with the current owner/manager of Bear Creek Stables.
- ✦ **Interpretive activities**—We strongly believe that education and historical awareness are the best means to foster and maintain a sense of respect for the Preserve in all users. As such, we have some suggestions for how to use existing areas of the preserve to educate the visiting public to its cultural and natural history and to encourage respectful use of the recreational areas.
- ✦ **Preservation and Restoration**— Through our visits to the preserves, we have seen first-hand the negative impact on the ecosystems resulting from human intervention. Most obvious is the evidence of destructive logging of the old-growth redwood forest. We would like the District to halt any further commercial logging in the Preserves. Although sustainable forestry is possible, it is challenging to do correctly. We do not want to risk further damage to these Preserves.

We've also observed the considerable amount of non-native, invasive french broom, thistle and ivy that exists in Bear Creek Redwoods. Some of us have already volunteered during the first Habitat Restoration workday that was organized by the District at Bear Creek Redwoods on January 15, 2005, when we worked to eradicate broom and ivy. We strongly support the District's efforts to restore the native habitat in these Preserves, and are now prepared to mobilize in even greater numbers to assist the District in this effort.

Specific Recommendations

With the above as background, here are our more specific requests, ideas, suggestions and concerns.

Neighborhood Access

We would like the District to consider walk-in/ride-in access to certain areas of the Preserves, as well as a small number of parking/staging access areas within our community. These are the most important access points currently identified from our neighborhoods into the two preserves:

- ❖ Summit Road into Bear Creek Redwoods (BCR), both east and west of Bear Creek Road, preferably from the old Christmas Tree Farm at the corner of Bear Creek Road and Summit Road.

Note: we would be supportive of a Stop Sign or other means to ensure a safe pedestrian or horse crossing of Bear Creek Road at its intersection with Summit Road. It would be useful to access the west-side trail which climbs up to Bear Creek Summit and also drops down to George Road. We are also hoping the District will acquire rights to parcel APN 54450002, so that we can drop down the existing fire road on this parcel to reach the trail network lower in the preserve.

- ❖ Redwood Estates into Bear Creek Redwoods, from east and west of Hwy 17.

This will require trail(s) through Moody Gulch, which is protected open space in perpetuity, will shortly (9/05) be owned by the three local water mutuals and may become part of BCR. Although the terrain is quite steep in places, there are existing trails from Redwood Estates into Moody Gulch, and to an open, level area by the creek known to locals as "The Encampment". These trails could link up with the old fire/logging roads on the former Hunt property, now part of BCR. Also, we are interested in the possibility of crossing under Hwy 17 at Big Moody Curve, to allow access from east of Hwy 17.

- ❖ George Road into Bear Creek Redwoods, West Side

This dirt road (off Bear Creek Road near Summit Road) leads to a great potential parking area with access to excellent trails, including one to the scenic vista point on Bear Creek Summit with a wonderful view of Monterey Bay and Monterey Peninsula.

- ❖ Highland Road into Sierra Azul (at Rattlesnake Gulch)

Rattlesnake Gulch is quite steep and subject to erosion. It is not currently a sustainable trail. But it appears to be the best access point from Highland Road into Sierra Azul, and a critical link in the goal of a "Mt Umunhum to the Sea" trail, passing through the Soquel Demonstration Forest and Forest of Nisene Marks. We'd like the District to consider reconstructing the trail to a more maintainable grade, and we would volunteer to assist.

- ❖ Wrights Stations Road and Aldercroft Heights into Sierra Azul
We've identified a wonderful, challenging trail option that begins with Loma Almaden Road departing from Aldercroft Heights Road and climbing up through the Cathedral Oaks area to a ridge top connecting trail near Mt Sombroso, which meets the existing Woods Road Trail. Some small sections are overgrown, but otherwise the route is open and usable fire road or former road.
- ❖ Sierra Azul connection to Soquel Demo Forest for Umunhum-to-the-Sea trail (including access to the summit of Mt. Umunhum)
This most likely would be at Rattlesnake Gulch, mentioned earlier. Access is strongly desired to the summit of Mt Umunhum via this trail, going past Loma Prieta and along the high, scenic ridge between Loma Prieta and Mt Umunhum.
- ❖ Access through San Jose Water Company land to Sierra Azul trails near Lake Ellsman and Williams Reservoir
These are highly scenic reservoirs, and local residents have sought low-intensity, responsible recreational access to this area for years. It could even be docent-led, along the lines of the recent policy at Crystal Springs Reservoir. We understand that this policy is set by SJWC, not MROSD, yet perhaps you can gain at least easement access through this land to trails in Sierra Azul.
- ❖ Lakeside School into Bear Creek Redwoods
Walk-in access from Lakeside School on Black Road could provide educational opportunities for kids. The access could be from Ellege Rd or Thompson Rd, at Gates BC03 or BC13.
- ❖ Adequate parking, staging areas from our community
Some of the above access points would not support a parking/staging area, and could be walk-in or ride-in trails. At the same time, we would like at least one adequate parking/staging area to each preserve from the Summit/Highland Road area. One could be the Christmas Tree Farm at Bear Creek and Summit Road. The other could potentially be the parking lot at Soquel Demonstration Forest. The Stewards of Soquel Demonstration Forest would like to be involved in a discussion with the District about this option. (www.soquelforest.org)

Multi-use Trails

Local residents request some multiple-use trails in both preserves. The two preserves are radically different from one another in climate, terrain, ecosystems, habitats and potential access options for local residents. During the hotter months, many areas of Sierra Azul are exposed chaparral and can be uncomfortable and even hazardous, whereas Bear Creek Redwoods stays much cooler due to its shady redwood forest. Also, many local residents live much closer to Bear Creek Redwoods (for example, the Redwood Estates residents.)

We do recognize the challenges associated with multi-use trails. Our belief is that this can be managed in the following general ways:

- ❖ Plan the multi-use trails carefully, based on experience gained from other successful multi-use trail systems and with input from all user groups
- ❖ Reserve some trails for the lowest-intensity users, e.g. hikers-only or hikers and horses only - no mountain bikes or dogs on those trails
- ❖ Consider the unique opportunities offered by these preserves; for example, the possibility of splitting Bear Creek Redwoods into East/West sections and applying different trail-use policies to these two areas
- ❖ Consider creating a trial period (for example, one year), in which experimental policy can be tested. We recognize that this is tricky, because once people have access to something, it is hard to take it away
- ❖ Educate all users about trail etiquette, and encourage self-policing within user groups

Specifically relating to Bear Creek Redwoods, suggest the following:

- ❖ Some areas and trails within BCR should be open only to hikers and horses. Practically speaking, given the location of the stables and the excellent horseback-riding trails in the eastern section of Bear Creek (BCR-E), it could make sense to reserve most or all of BCR-E to hikers and horses only. One low-impact exception could be to allow dogs on-leash in a limited area, or dogs off-leash in a fenced area.
- ❖ The Western section of Bear Creek (BCR-W), also offers fantastic fire roads and trails that go all the way to the vista point at Bear Creek Summit. It could make sense to make BCR-W fully multi-use (hikers, horses, mountain bikes, dogs). When we toured these trails, all user groups liked it there. One person felt that he could actually use the trails to commute by mountain bike to his job in Los Gatos, without having to ride on Bear Creek Road. Perhaps this could also be a segment of the Bay Area Ridge Trail, which would be consistent with its multi-use policy.
- ❖ Another option would be to have horses on the east side, and mountain-bikes on the west side (i.e. no horses there); the equestrians in our group prefer the idea of allowing horses in both sides, and letting the horseback rider choose whether to stay in the single-use BCR-E or use the multi-use trails in BCR-W.

Besides this simple-to-understand policy of splitting Bear Creek Redwoods into East and West, here are some other ideas we had:

- ❖ Directional up-only or walk-down-only trails
- ❖ Quasi-parallel trails
- ❖ Odd/even access days
- ❖ Non-multi-use trails in high-use areas, and multi-use trails in remote areas

Dogs

Regarding dog access, many of our residents own dogs and would like to be able to walk with our dogs close to home. Some women in our group said that they feel safer with their dog at their side when hiking alone. We understand the problems associated with unleashed dogs and irresponsible dog owners. We are familiar with the current dog access guidelines adopted by the District for other preserves, and we support those policies: dogs on leash, cleaning up after one's dog, keeping the leashed dog under control when approached by others. If necessary, we would be willing to apply for a dog-access permit, which could require proof of license, rabies vaccinations, and a signature to keep the dog on leash and only go on certain trails.

We also understand the impact that even a well-controlled, leashed dog can have on an ecosystem, just by leaving behind its scent. Therefore, we would support and recommend limiting dogs to certain trails only. We would also be willing to self-police, and council or report others who violate the guidelines.

Other Trail Requests

- ❖ Assuming that there is reasonable trail access from our communities, we would prefer loop trails rather than out-and-back. For example, if there is a trail from the summit down, it would be nice to have a different one that comes back up.
- ❖ Convenient access to mix of trails:
 - Easy family trails (e.g., a twenty-minute after-dinner walk)
 - Challenging all-day hikes/rides/runs
- ❖ Trail Connections to other trail systems and open space areas, for both humans and wildlife. For example, to the Bay Area Ridge Trail, the Soquel Demonstration Forest, and even perhaps finding a way to cross under Hwy 17 at the toe of Bear Creek Redwoods, to permit connecting to the trails in Lexington Reservoir area. One of our members reported that a friend rode his motorcycle under Highway 17 there about 30 years ago. We have heard that there may be a passage-way there, but

that it is an important wildlife corridor. We would respect the need to keep this reserved as a wildlife corridor, if that is the case.

Privacy, Security and Traffic

As mentioned earlier, the flip side of allowing greater access to these lands is the responsibility to consider the impact on our neighborhoods, such as:

- Public and private mountain road issues
- Fire and illegal activity

When specific questions arise during the planning process, we would welcome the opportunity to work with the District and provide advice based on our knowledge of the area and the roads.

Stables

Because the District is conducting separate discussions with representatives of the Stables, we will leave more specific details out of this petition.

Interpretive Activities

"Perhaps it was the history. Here is a place with a colorful, varied past, with hunters and loggers, toll road builders, disappearing ghost towns, and luxurious estates, including a forty-room villa complete with a hundred-person staff, and a Roman plunge pool. Here were fantastic gardens featuring giant dahlias, lilies, roses, fuchsias, and nadina shrubs maintained by 43 gardeners.

Although the estates and gardens are gone, you can still see the remains of walkways, gazebos, walls, bridges, and alcoves. You can see the private carriageway built by James L. Flood leading from his estate to the town of Alma in order to bypass the dusty Dougherty Road (now Bear Creek Road). Ironically, while the estate and town have disappeared, the carriageway once known as Flood Road, now called Alma College Road, still exists.

James L. Flood's father was reputed to be the wealthiest man in California. He paid his son's girlfriend, a beautiful blond, blue-eyed burlesque queen, \$25,000 to leave town. She did, but his son followed, and the couple married in Naples. Although she was never accepted by the family, father and son reconciled. Lucky for the son. He and his sister divided an estate valued at \$18.5 million.

In 1934, the 270-acre estate, then owned by another millionaire, Harry Tevis, but still called "Alma Dale," was sold to the Sacred Heart Novitiate of Los Gatos and the Jesuit Order for \$85,000, transforming a rich man's playground into Alma College, a religious school. After the college relocated to Berkeley in 1969, the property was used by several schools. Some of the buildings still remain, but restoration could be expensive. Nevertheless, they could form the basis for an excellent visitor center/mountain history museum complex."

Wiley, Neil, *Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space*, **Mountain Network News**, December 2003, page 18

Bear Creek Redwoods and Sierra Azul lie within one of the more historic areas of the Santa Cruz Mountains. A number of books have been written and many wonderful old photographs and historic artifacts still exist within our community. These could form the foundation of an interpretive collection.

Our members include the founder of the Mountain History Study Group and many others willing to be docents with an interpretive focus on mountain history.

The Whaler's Cabin Museum and Whaling Station Museum at Point Lobos State Reserve offer interesting examples of what is possible and consistent with the mission of a reserve:

The history of shore whaling on the central coast as it took place many years ago is told in this small museum that used to be a garage next to the Whalers Cabin. Displays of artifacts collected show different sizes of harpoons and whaling tools, whale-oil barrels, a model of a shore whaling boat, diagrams of whale-oil processing, and photographs of the old Monterey Peninsula whalers. This special addition was opened in 1994.



Under the direction of Point Lobos Docent Kurt Loesch, descendants of the families who lived at Point Lobos were contacted. Old photographs, artifacts and memorabilia were collected and added to the archives. The park history was researched through governments records and local newspapers archives.

- from Point Lobos State Reserve web site

A local history center could be combined with a Nature Center that focuses on unique natural features of these Preserves, such as the majestic old-growth redwoods on the west side of Bear Creek Redwoods.

Master Plan Implementation Schedule

While we are aware that the District has a stated timeline for creating the master plan, we are also concerned about the implementation schedule of that plan. We certainly recognize that premature opening of areas not yet prepared to handle multi-use activities is ill-advised. However, we suggest that timely access to the Preserves can be provided in a phased manner by permitting the lowest intensity activities in those areas already adequately provided with parking areas and trails.

Based on our group participation in the Preserve tours, we suggest that both Rancho de Guadalupe and the West side of Bear Creek Redwoods are two areas that could be opened for public access shortly after plan approval is complete. The George Road entrance into Bear Creek Redwoods seems to offer reasonable parking. These areas could be handled using the current permit process in the interim period.

Conclusion

As long-time residents committed to living in these mountains, we believe that our participation is a vital element to maintaining the natural environment of the Preserves and in developing their public usage policies. We would like the District to consider us as a community partner in the master plan development and implementation process. As such, our group is available as an ongoing source of local information, as well as a sounding board for draft proposals. Our members are here to stay, and here to be actively involved in an ongoing relationship with the District.

Respectfully submitted,

Rebecca Moore, on behalf of **Mountain Open Space Stewards (MOSS)**
July 14, 2005

List of MOSS members is attached.

Please note: This document was a collaborative writing project; special thanks to Patricia Boswell and Neil Wiley for their contributions, and to all MOSS members for their ideas and input on the questionnaires, forum postings, emails and in our meetings. Also thanks to Chris Boswell for his Sierra Azul contribution to our Google Earth geographic presentation.