



A N N U A L



U P D A T E



GENERAL MANAGER'S MESSAGE

This past year, with your support, the District took many great leaps forward to fulfill your vision for open space—from land acquisition and habitat restoration to public access and community outreach. Our goal is to complete the system of open space preserves that you identified through the District's open space Vision Plan and have chosen to support through Measure AA.



Last fall, our Board approved a five-year list of Measure AA projects that expand our work to preserve land, restore habitat, and improve public access. In the last year, we have expedited dozens of projects, including extensive work to prepare to open three major nature destinations: the Mount Umunhum Summit in Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve, Bear Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve, and La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve.

Our accomplishments are moving forward with the additional support of Measure AA. We have:

- Completed work preparation of Mindogo Hill so we can open trails at that beautiful site in 2016;
- Protected key lands where we can strengthen the greenbelt, preserve grazing lands, protect headwaters and creeks, create staging areas, and connect trails;
- Completed the El Corte de Madera Creek Watershed Protection Project, protecting steelhead trout and Coho salmon;
- Restored damaged ponds on the Coastside, improving water infrastructure for grazing and wildlife; and
- Expanded trail systems at Russian Ridge Open Space Preserve, El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserve, and Sierra Azul Open Space Preserve.

We're also using Measure AA resources to strengthen and develop partnerships. We're very proud of a new partnership with the County of San Mateo, Department of Parks and Recreation, which uses \$1 million in county Measure A funds to work on the Bay Trail. With additional support from the District's Measure AA funds, we will

complete a critical gap in the trail, creating an 80-mile contiguous stretch of trail that parallels the 101 corridor and provides outdoor recreation and a safe commute route for pedestrians and bicyclists.

All of this is possible because of the public's long-term commitment to fund a system of open space preserves on the peninsula. To maximize the impact of this funding, the District recently achieved an upgrade of our bond rating, from AA and AA+ to AAA, and we were able to sell our first tranche of bonds, \$45 million, with a \$2.3 million premium, which we passed onto taxpayers as a reduced assessment. This year, District residents will pay 80 cents per \$100,000 in assessed value rather than \$1.10 originally anticipated. In addition, we are carefully reviewing how we do our work, particularly project delivery, and are in the process of making changes to the organization that will allow us to most effectively meet the goals of Measure AA.

Meanwhile, we have continued to grow and nurture all of our existing programs including community outreach, volunteer enrichment, docent-led activities, events for youth and families, scientific research, and our core work to protect humans and wildlife alike throughout our 26 preserves.

We thank you for your support and your trust in us; and we look forward to fulfilling the vision we share, one in which every person in our region enjoys improved mental and physical health, clean air and water, free outdoor activities, the biodiversity we need to survive, and all the countless other benefits of living in a thriving natural environment.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Stephen E. Abbors". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

STEPHEN E. ABBORS
General Manager

PUBLIC ACCESS HIGHLIGHTS

The past year has been vitally important to the Midpen mission to preserve and protect open space, and to provide recreation in the preserves. While the list of achievements is extensive, a few highlights include:

- Completion of trails in Russian Ridge, Sierra Azul at Mt. Umunhum, and El Corte de Madera Creek Open Space Preserves.
- Completion of planning for additional trails and trail extensions at Purisima-to-the-Sea Regional Trail and along the San Francisco Bay Trail north of East Palo Alto.

PLANNED/UPCOMING PROJECTS

- **Mindego Area Access:** The extension of Mindego Hill Trail to the top of Mindego Hill opens in spring 2016 with the reintroduction of cattle grazing.
- **Mount Umunhum Summit and Trail:** Once completed, visitors will find an ADA-accessible interpretive trail, information about the area's rich natural and cultural history, and expansive views of the entire Bay Area, Monterey Bay, Santa Cruz, and even the Sierra Nevada. Trail and summit are expected to open in the fall of 2016.
- **Bear Creek Redwoods Access:** Bear Creek Open Space Preserve, with its shaded fir and redwood forests, cool perennial creeks, and spectacular views of the Sierra Azul Range, is expected to open to the public in 2018. In order to open the preserve for public access, several high-priority public access and resource management projects must be developed, including the Bear Creek Redwoods Preserve Plan, Bear Creek Stables Site Plan, and Alma College Landscape Rehabilitation Plan.



MINDEGO GATEWAY PARKING AREA: Opened May 2014 in partnership with Peninsula Open Space Trust. The project offers a new parking area, viewing platform, and restroom and connects the greater portion of Russian Ridge to the diverse Mindego Hill Area of the preserve.



BALD MOUNTAIN PARKING: Funded by a grant from the Coastal Conservancy, the new parking area and restroom provides visitors an access point for the future trail to the Mount Umunhum summit.

PASSAGE OF MEASURE AA

On June 3, 2014, with a two-thirds majority, District voters approved Measure AA, a general obligation bond measure that authorizes Midpen to issue up to \$300 million in bonds over the next 20 to 30 years to fulfill the capital projects in the Top 25 Vision Plan Priority Action Portfolios as identified in the Vision Plan.





VOLUNTEERS BY THE NUMBERS

We couldn't do all we do at Midpen without the selfless hard work our volunteers contribute to accomplish so many varied tasks. Try on these impressive examples of volunteer achievements from the 2014-15 year:

300	Free guided activities
82	Outdoor service projects
5	Eagle Scout projects
3	Park management internships
2	Girl Scout Gold Awards
20	New recruits for community outreach work
45	New recruits for volunteer trail patrol
165	Total active volunteers on trail patrol
30	New volunteers in the Advanced Resource Management Squad (ARMS)
1,370	Total number of ARMS volunteers' hours of service
20,000	Hours of time
\$537,400	Total estimated cost savings* due to volunteer services

*based on the Independent Sector- Fiscal Value of Volunteer Hours (by State)

ENGAGING OUR VISITORS

Research shows that families who spend time connecting with the peace, beauty, and solitude of nature are planting a seed that will grow into a lifelong appreciation for nature and will lead healthier, happier lives. We also know we can enrich their experience when we offer opportunities to engage on a more interactive level. Midpen provides a wide array of opportunities to educate, experience, and celebrate nature's treasures in the preserves. A few examples of such offerings over the past year include the following:

- More than 3,300 visitors participated in 233 docent-led hikes, bike rides, and dog walks to see and explore watersheds, fungi, bats, oaks, Ohlone medicine, birds, and a variety of other topics.
- The David C. Daniels Nature Center welcomed over 3,400 visitors providing an incredible opportunity for families to discover the value of the great diversity of plant and animal life in the region.
- Third-through-fifth graders throughout the District participated in our docent-led Spaces and Species Field Trips at Skyline Ridge Preserve led by docents. Midpen also helped to fund transportation for classes that would have been unable to attend.
- 2,200 elementary schoolchildren visited Los Trancos, Monte Bello, and Windy Hill preserves, and our partners at Environmental Volunteers helped enrich their experiences.
- We partnered with Latino Outdoors to help us bring the same interpretive and educational opportunities to diverse audiences and led Spanish-language hikes. The nonprofit group is also helping train staff and volunteers.





FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

Midpen completed another year of strong financial management, balancing spending with revenues and leveraging those funds with additional grants. We experienced a 5 percent increase in revenues due to an increase in property tax collections in the Midpeninsula region, our primary source of revenue.

The true headliner in Midpen's fiscal story was the support shown by the voters in passing Measure AA, which will provide \$300 million over the next 20 years to continue to protect open space, restore the environment, and provide greater recreational access to the spaces.

Meanwhile, prudent financial management, strategic long-term planning, and a clear vision has earned Midpen an AAA bond rating, reflecting Midpen's strong fiscal position and earning us the ability to borrow money for projects at low interest rates. As of this writing, we have just completed an advantageous sale of Measure AA bonds to move forward with the public's high-priority items as established in the Measure AA visioning process.

BUDGET

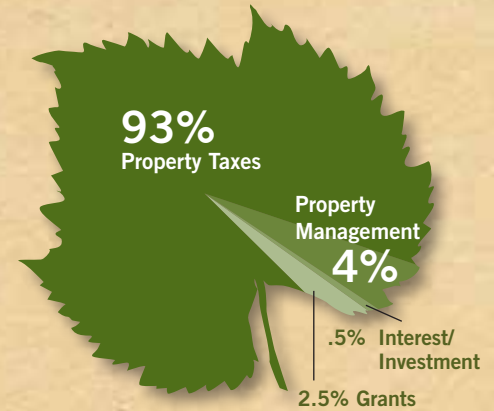
District expenditures totaled \$35.6 million and remained within the budget approved by the District Board of Directors. Excluding land acquisitions and debt service, total expenditures were \$21.5 million, which is \$4.2 million or 16.3% below the budget. Of the \$8.0 million in land purchases and capital expenditures, \$5.2 million is eligible for reimbursement from the Measure AA general obligation bonds.

MEASURE AA BONDS

In August 2015 the District sold its first series of Measure AA bonds for \$45 million. Funds will be used for both previous land acquisitions and capital projects that occurred in fiscal year 2014 and for land acquisitions and capital projects moving forward for the next three years. For fiscal year 2014-15, \$5.2 million of Measure AA funds were used. Because of favorable interest rates, the Measure AA tax rate for 2015-16 is approximately 80 cents per \$100,000 of assessed property value.

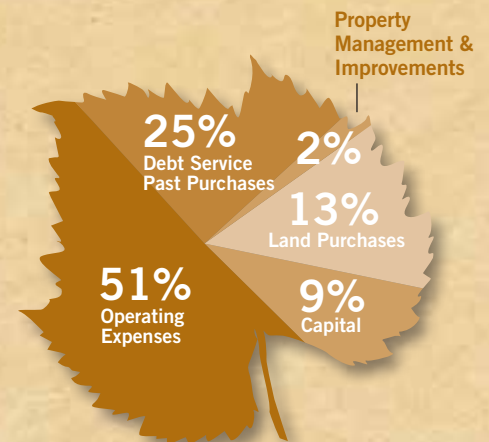
Revenues: \$37,887,134*

Property taxes	\$35,081,540
Property management	\$1,436,680
Grants	\$952,925
Interest/Investments	\$174,654
Other/Miscellaneous	\$241,335



Expenditures: \$35,610,809*

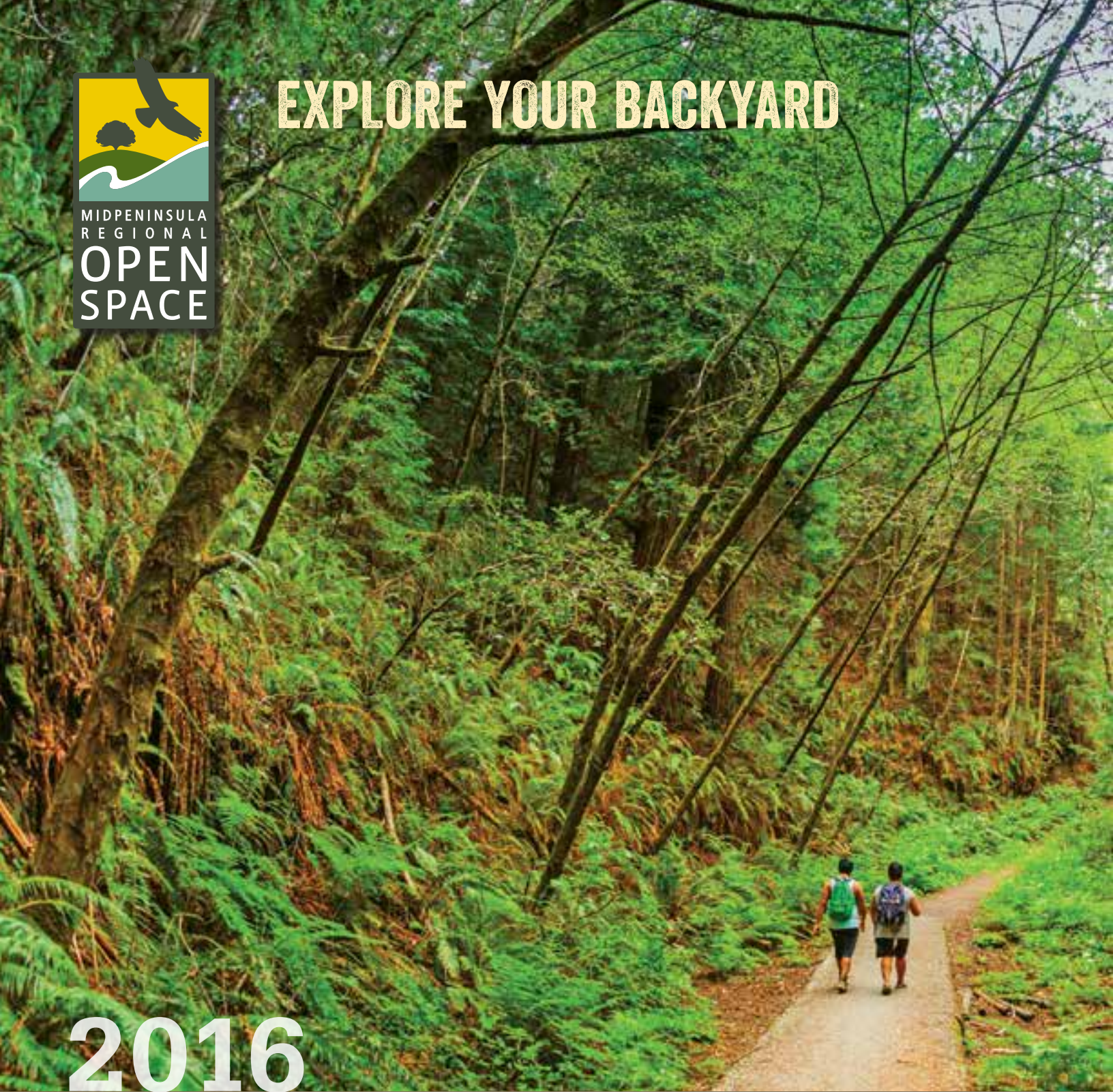
Operating expenses	\$18,067,992
Debt service on prior purchases	\$8,893,601
Property management & improvements	\$615,280
Land acquisition	\$4,771,119
Capital Expenditures	\$3,262,817



* From Audited Financial Statement, March 31, 2015
Excess of Revenues Over Expenditures \$2,317,281



EXPLORE YOUR BACKYARD



2016



JANUARY

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Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserve



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NOVEMBER

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DECEMBER

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FULLFILLING THE PROMISE OF MEASURE AA



The sale of Measure AA bonds will allow us to open currently closed areas for public access and recreation, purchase land as it becomes available (including redwood forests), and improve access to hiking and biking trails. We will be able to help preserve agriculture along the San Mateo Coast and pursue restoration projects for streams, creeks, ponds, and other waterways critical for long-term protection and water supply. One year after passage, Measure AA is already delivering on its promise to the voters. The following are just a sample of the high-priority projects now underway using Measure AA funds:

- Purchasing of additional lands to grow the District's contiguous greenbelt.
- Leveraging partnerships to create connections between District lands and other open space/park lands, such as Alpine Ranch and Stevens Creek Trail Corridor, and Monte Bello and Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space Preserves (OSP).
- Opening Mindego Hill after introducing cattle for resource management.
- Acquiring land and beginning planning of a Purisima-to-Sea trail from Skyline area.
- Providing public access and amenities for hiking, biking, and equestrian activities on Mt. Umunhum.
- Adding elements to existing Cooley Landing in partnership with the City of East Palo Alto.
- Completing trails and closing gaps in the San Francisco Bay Trail and adjacent Ravenswood OSP.

ACQUISITION AND PRESERVATION



LOBITOS CREEK AREA OF PURISIMA CREEK OSP

In March 2015, Midpen purchased the 40-acre Riggs property as an addition to Purisima Creek Redwoods OSP. The property helps to protect the Lobitos Creek watershed, which provides spawning habitat for Coho salmon and steelhead trout, and protects scenic views from Highway 1 on the San Mateo Coast.



ALPINE RANCH

Next to Pescadero Creek County Park, this gorgeous 353-acre Alpine Ranch property features beautiful redwood forests, two critical watersheds, and a connection to protected open space land. The ridgeline provides expansive views of the upper Pescadero watershed and includes views of Portola Redwoods State Park, Butano Ridge, and the Pacific Ocean.



NEW LAND IN MONTE BELLO

The final property needed to complete the proposed Stevens Creek Trail was recently purchased in conjunction with Santa Clara County. This 60-acre property along Stevens Canyon Road will be an addition to Monte Bello OSP.

RESTORATION AND CONSERVATION

Restored lands provide many benefits, such as improved fish and wildlife productivity, pollution reduction, flood protection, and recreational opportunities. These services not only improve the health of our region, but collectively, these projects form a green infrastructure, that supports a high quality of life for our residents. As we work toward achieving the region's vision, we're proud to share with you these snapshots of just some of our conservation work this year.



CONSERVATION GRAZING PROGRAM

As part of its resource management plan, the District expanded its conservation grazing program by re-introducing cattle at the Red Barn in La Honda Creek OSP and making water system repairs and upgrades at Mindego Ranch. The District's conservation grazing program serves several important purposes, including fuel reduction for fire protection, restoring biodiversity of the land, and retaining historic ranching within the San Mateo Coast region.

PROTECTION OF RARE AND SENSITIVE SPECIES

Midpen continues efforts in support of the recovery of the San Francisco garter snake partnering with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to secure permitting to improve habitat for the species at the Mindego Ranch area of Russian Ridge OSP.

Surveys for California red-legged frogs at the La Honda Creek OSP are proving the value of the District's pond restoration and management projects. Despite a low-water year, young frogs were observed in one of the recently repaired stock ponds, indicating breeding success of the frogs at the site.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR CONSERVATION

In cooperation with conservation partners, Midpen continues to protect threatened and endangered species and eradicate invasive plants.

- National Marine Fisheries Service conducted a survey of Permanente Creek within Rancho San Antonio to assess habitat for steelhead trout
- San Mateo County Resource Conservation District treated the invasive grass slender false brome on properties neighboring Thornewood OSP.
- California Academy of Sciences and other organizations collaborated with Midpen on a bioblitz at San Mateo County's Memorial Park.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife authorized an endangered species recovery permit at La Honda and Russian Ridge OSPs.

COMMITMENT TO WATERSHED PROTECTION

Throughout the years, Midpen has worked to protect and maintain the health of watersheds throughout the area. We've stayed true to our mission of preserving plants, animals and natural communities by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. Watershed health and success is reflected in many of the projects Midpen has completed. Roads that used to collect water and erode into gullies now drain effectively. Streams that were buried in soil are now bridged or have had culverts properly installed. Trails that ran through streams have been rerouted to protect direct impact. To accomplish these goals, Midpen has been committed to working in partnership with local resource agencies. In 2014, Midpen was



awarded a grant of \$230,970 from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife toward watershed protection construction costs at La Honda Creek OSP. This grant helped fund a portion of a project that included almost five miles of road upgrades and repair of an existing stock pond. Along with reducing sediment downstream, these improvements helped to create a system supporting future public access.

Although the growing drought has created many regional challenges, the lack of rain has allowed many time-sensitive projects to move forward more quickly than anticipated. The El Niño rains expected this winter will be an early test of repaired roads and trails. With record rains headed our way, these critical repairs will prevent many legacy trails and roads from being washed away.



Mission Statement: 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.



**Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
Board of Directors**

Midpen is governed by a seven-member board of directors. The District is divided into seven geographic wards, each represented by an elected board member for a four-year term. The District itself consists of San Mateo, Santa Clara, and parts of Santa Cruz counties.

Board of Directors (left to right): Jed Cyr, Ward 3; Nonette Hanko, Ward 5; Cecily Harris, Ward 7; Larry Hasset, Ward 6; Pete Siemens, Ward 1; Yoriko Kishimoto, Ward 2; Curt Riffle, Ward 4.



DISTRICT PROFILE



**FOUNDED
IN 1972**



**62,383
ACRES**



**225 MILES
OF TRAILS**



**26
PRESERVES**



**135 EMPLOYEES
IN 3 OFFICES**



**2 MILLION
VISITORS
PER YEAR**



**\$43.9 MILLION
BUDGET**



**720,000
RESIDENTS**





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