

# 2014 Vision Plan Summary

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IMAGINE  
*the Future of Open Space*

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# Overview

## ABOUT

Since its founding by voter initiative in 1972, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (Midpen, District) has successfully protected over 62,000 acres of open space in San Mateo, Santa Clara and a small portion of Santa Cruz counties. These lands are located in 26 preserves where local residents hike, bike, run, take docent-led tours and enjoy the spectacular forests, baylands, ridgelines and mountains of the Silicon Valley. These preserves are also home to 90 rare native species that live in a range of diverse and sensitive habitats including redwood forests, rugged peaks, agricultural lands, marshlands, creeks and watersheds.

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*The mission of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District is 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.*

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## ADAPTING to CHANGE

In 2012, as Midpen celebrated its 40th anniversary, its Board of Directors recognized that the District was at an important juncture in its history. In its first 40 years, Midpen had focused on acquiring land, often just ahead of massive development projects throughout the region. Over the same period, the region's social landscape had changed dramatically, both in terms of its demographics and in its social values and priorities:

- Due to a growing interest in healthy lifestyles, visits to the preserves doubled between 1995 and 2010. People lived and worked in cities, but they played, recharged and stayed healthy in open space.
- Opportunities to partner with state parks, cities, counties, other special districts and nonprofits were on the rise.
- Silicon Valley continued to be a magnet for talented workers from around the country and the world. Not only was the region's population growing, it was growing more diverse.

### 1990–2010 Population Changes in San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties

	San Mateo County	Santa Clara County	Combined Population	Combined Population by Race/Ethnicity			
				Caucasian	Asian	Black	Latino
1990	649,623	1,497,577	2,147,200	1,502,882	370,883	89,945	420,203
2010	718,451	1,781,642	2,500,093	1,220,151	748,642	66,864	661,712
% Change	10.6%	19.0%	16.4%	-18.8%	101.9%	-25.7%	57.5%

*“May we always have beautiful places.”*

—Nonette Hanko, Midpen Founding Director

## THE VISION PLAN SUMMARY

To systematically arrive at a strategic course for the future, Midpen launched *Imagine the Future of Open Space*, an 18-month visioning process to:

- Engage as many people as possible in a meaningful and structured conversation about the preservation and use of open space in the District,
- Assess critical opportunities for conservation on the San Francisco Peninsula, South Bay, and San Mateo Coastside, and
- Develop a regional vision for the future of open space.

Through a comprehensive community engagement process and a thorough resource assessment, Midpen developed **54 Priority Action Portfolios** focused on the three legs of the mission: land protection, habitat restoration and low-intensity recreation. These were prioritized by the public and approved by Midpen’s Board of Directors in January 2014 as a slate of 25 high-priority project portfolios and 29 additional portfolios to be completed as time and resources allow.

Five months later, the general public demonstrated broad community support for the Vision Plan by passing Measure AA, which authorized Midpen to issue up to \$300 million in bonds over the next 20 to 30 years to fund the hundreds of capital projects within the 25 top priority portfolios.

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### Experience Nature in Your “Backyard”

Midpen offers free activities for people of all ages. Preserves are open **365** days a year and feature:

**225** miles of trail for hikers, bikers and horseback riders,

Environmental education programs like the David C. Daniels Nature Center,

Robust volunteer and docent programs, with over **500** people who contribute **19,000** hours of their time per year, and

Over **300** free guided activities per year.

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## Open Space

Is defined as land that:

Remains in or returns to its natural state and may also include ecologically-sensitive agricultural land,

Protects areas of scenic beauty and preserves natural habitat,

Provides essential life support systems that remove air and water pollution, produce oxygen and mitigate climate change,

Offers opportunities for education, recreation, and renewal of spirit,

Establishes boundaries for urban growth, and

Enhances regional quality of life.

# Community Engagement: The People behind the Vision Plan

A variety of constituent groups brought key knowledge to this 18-month conversation through a **32-member Community Advisory Committee** of:

- Local elected officials,
- Community leaders and advocates,
- Conservation and environmental partners,
- Amah Mutsun leadership,
- Hikers,
- Mountain bikers,
- Horseback riders,
- Neighbors and neighborhood associations.



Members of the CAC with Midpen Board and Staff

Local community college students and staff held **725 community conversations** with people in farmers' markets, coffee shops and preserves asking, "What is your vision for open space and why is it important to you?"

There were **38,000 page views** on the Vision Plan's civic engagement web site. A single discussion thread titled "Looking to the Future" had 1,200 comments and 4,100 views.

**1,000 new social media followers** joined the discussion.

**40 partner** organizations and associations shared their perspectives.

Altogether **2,200 community members** contributed to the Vision Plan:

- 1,000** participated in workshops and community interviews,
- 600** users registered and provided comments on the civic engagement web site, and
- 600** more participated in a telephone survey.

## FINDINGS

From thousands of inputs, comments, statements and survey responses, staff identified five core themes, and associated goals which, when aggregated, represent the social values of a region that is world-renowned for its bright, diverse and forward-looking residents.

1. Outdoor Recreation and Healthy Living (29%)
2. Enjoyment of Natural, Cultural and Scenic Landscapes (25%)
3. Healthy Nature—Plants, Animals, Lands and Waterways (19%)
4. Connecting with Nature and Each Other (14%)
5. Viable Working Lands (13%)



## Telephone Survey Results

**96%** view Midpen preserves as an important public resource.

**90%** say that open space improves the quality of life for residents of the densely urban and suburban communities in Santa Clara and San Mateo counties.

**90%** say that open space and trails contribute to the community's overall health and wellness.

## Vision Plan Goals

**Outdoor Recreation and Healthy Living:** Provide accessible open space lands for recreation and outdoor exercise in nature.

**Cultural and Scenic Landscape Preservation:** Conserve the area's scenery and rich history; provide places for escape and quiet enjoyment.

**Healthy Nature:** Take care of the land, air, water and soil so that plants and animals thrive and people can receive nature's benefits.

**Connecting with Nature and Each Other:** Provide opportunities for people to learn about and appreciate the natural environment and to connect with nature and each other.

**Viable Working Lands:** Provide viable working lands that reflect our agricultural heritage and provide food and jobs.

# The Research behind the Vision Plan



The Vision Plan Area is the 371,000-acre area that includes Midpen lands, its jurisdiction and sphere of influence.

While the community engagement strategies were underway, a research team of staff and local experts assembled and evaluated biological, cultural, agricultural and recreational conditions within the Vision Plan Area. These studies identified critical opportunities for conservation and the open space projects that would result in maximum benefits to wildlife, plants, waterways, interpretation and education, habitat connectivity, and access.

*“It’s all about connections. Connecting habitats and connecting trails.”*

— Community Member

## COMMUNITY INPUT + SCIENCE = VISION PLAN

By combining the results of the community engagement process with rigorous technical analyses and assessment, staff developed 54 major open space priority action portfolios. These project portfolios include hundreds of projects to preserve land, manage resources, conserve and improve agricultural lands, and provide public recreation, interpretative programs, outdoor education and nature engagement activities. The project areas were selected for maximum effectiveness, conservation values and the strength of their alignment with the community’s vision.

In three-hour workshops, held in five locations, **234 members** of the public learned about the **54 portfolios**, their conservation values, goals and associated projects. They then ranked, prioritized and voted on the portfolios in real time using handheld electronic voting pads.



Kay Hosler



Ray Hoiler

Meanwhile, on Midpen’s civic engagement web site, community members continued to discuss, refine, and develop their priorities. The Community Advisory Committee analyzed the data and provided additional input in its monthly meetings. Staff synthesized **18 months** of qualitative and quantitative data, and developed a ranked list of major open space project portfolios, which were reviewed, adjusted and approved in two public deliberation sessions with Midpen’s Board of Directors, with over 100 public members in attendance at each meeting. On January 29, 2014, Midpen’s Board of Directors approved a slate of 25 high-priority project portfolios and 29 additional portfolios to be completed as time and resources allow. These **54 Priority Action Portfolios** represent hundreds of projects that will open preserves, build trails and trail connections, improve water quality, protect the coastline, restore native vegetation, connect habitat and strengthen biodiversity.

On June 3, 2014, with a two-thirds majority, District residents 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**.

## THE FUTURE of OPEN SPACE

Midpen’s community-driven Vision Plan will:

- Protect redwood forests,
- Ensure clean water and protect salmon habitat,
- Add over **200 miles** of new trails,
- Open **20,000 acres** of land,
- Create 13 new staging and parking areas,
- Provide outdoor education opportunities at 14 locations,
- Preserve over **50,000 acres** of additional open space,
- Enhance wetlands and ponds for rare wildlife at ten open space preserves,
- Create wildlife corridors in an increasingly urbanized region, and
- Improve ranches and rangelands at four open space preserves.



Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District Board of Directors

Left to right: Jed Cyr, Nonette Hanko, Cecily Harris, Larry Hassett, Pete Siemens, Yoriko Kishimoto, and Curt Riffle

Jack Geeshardt

—See page 17 for a map of the Top 25 Portfolio Action Portfolios

Portfolio Highlights:  
Outdoor Recreation and Healthy Living



Partner to complete gaps in Bay Trail

Ellie Van Houtte



Complete Purisima-to-Sea Trail

Sandy Sommer



Open La Honda Creek

Streecher Smith



This map shows a long-term, shared vision of a thriving, interconnected regional open space network, accomplished with POST, San Mateo and Santa Clara County, State Parks, and other public and private partners.

When the Vision Plan trails are complete, 99% of Midpen residents will live within 5 miles of a regional trail.





# The Vision: Outdoor Recreation and Healthy Living

## Open an Additional 20,000 Acres of Land

Throughout the District, Midpen has lands that are closed because they still need restoration, remediation, safety features, trails and parking lots.

With support from Measure AA, over 20,000 acres will be opened to the public in La Honda Creek, Miramontes Ridge, Bear Creek Redwoods, Purisima Creek Redwoods, Russian Ridge and four areas within Sierra Azul: Mount Umunhum summit, Rancho de Guadalupe, Loma Prieta and Cathedral Oaks.

## Build 200 Miles of New Trail

Trail systems will connect cities to the coast and bay and expand recreational opportunities for people of all fitness levels. In addition to the trail systems shown on the map, the Vision Plan will also:

- Expand existing trail systems in Windy Hill, Purisima Creek Redwoods, Russian Ridge, El Sereno, and Sierra Azul,
- Create new trail systems in newly-opened lands in Miramontes Ridge, La Honda Creek, and Bear Creek Redwoods,
- Enhance capacity at high-use preserves like Fremont Older and Rancho San Antonio, and
- Enhance trail systems that also serve as alternate routes to school and work.
  - Improve connections between cities and the Bay.
  - Fill in gaps to establish a continuous 70-mile stretch of the Bay Trail from Redwood City to the South Bay to Fremont.
  - Enhance transportation and recreation in neighborhoods from Mountain View to Saratoga via the Stevens Creek Trail.

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*“Trails and open space allow me to get out of the city, recharge, and enjoy creation.”*

— Community Member

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Portfolio Highlights:  
Cultural and Scenic Landscape Preservation



Preserve scenic open space

Sreelha Smith



Partner to rehabilitate Hawthorn historic area

Midpen Staff



Provide interpretive services of Mindego Ranch and Native American uses

Ray Cowan



# The Vision: Cultural and Scenic Landscape Preservation

*“I like to just lie on the grass under the sun and enjoy the birds chirping, the mountains and all the beauty. These are wonderful places to get away from the stresses of everyday life.”*

— Community Member

The Vision Plan Area is full of hundreds of special places, unmatched sweeping views, pristine ridges, inspiring forests, unbroken coastlines and panoramic vistas that are the iconic backdrop of the Silicon Valley. Within these natural and scenic landscapes is **a human history that spans 6,000 years**. A cultural assessment found **81 culturally significant sites** on Midpen lands. These include Native American monuments and gardens, Spanish colonial travel routes, mines and logging operations of American settlers, and homes, ranchos and estates from the region’s rich and colorful local history. The Vision Plan seeks to protect these views and cultural histories, to sustain enduring connections between people and places.

Fremont Older OSP by Tim Chavez



24

Protect cultural and natural resources using traditional Native American stewardship practices

Alice Cummings



29

Protect coastal views

Frances Freyberg



49

Preserve the Stevens Canyon Ranch

Car Allen



51

Protect historic Woodhills

Midpen Staff

Portfolio Highlights:  
**Healthy Nature**



Protect bayfront habitat

©Yamil Saenz



Remove fish barriers and restore Lobitos Creek

©David Salabery



Deter marbled murrelet predators and protect water quality

©Tom Hamer



Improve habitat for red-legged frog

©Cary Nicks

The Conservation Value Map combines information about priority watersheds, sensitive and highly significant plant life, rare species and habitat connections—and provides visual indicators of the areas where restoration and conservation efforts will have maximum benefits.



# Priority Action Portfolio # (Approximate location)

Conservation Values

- High
- Low

Streams supporting Rare Salmonids

- Coho Salmon & Steelhead Trout (Tier 1a)
- Steelhead Trout Only (Tier 1b)

Midpen open space preserves

This map shows the overall value of land within the Vision Plan Area for the conservation of biodiversity. Areas of high overall conservation value feature multiple, co-occurring biodiversity elements and therefore are important targets for conservation efforts.



# The Vision: Healthy Nature

*“These spaces are abundant with nature’s true treasures.*

*We should see them as jewels, not for sale.”*

— Community Member

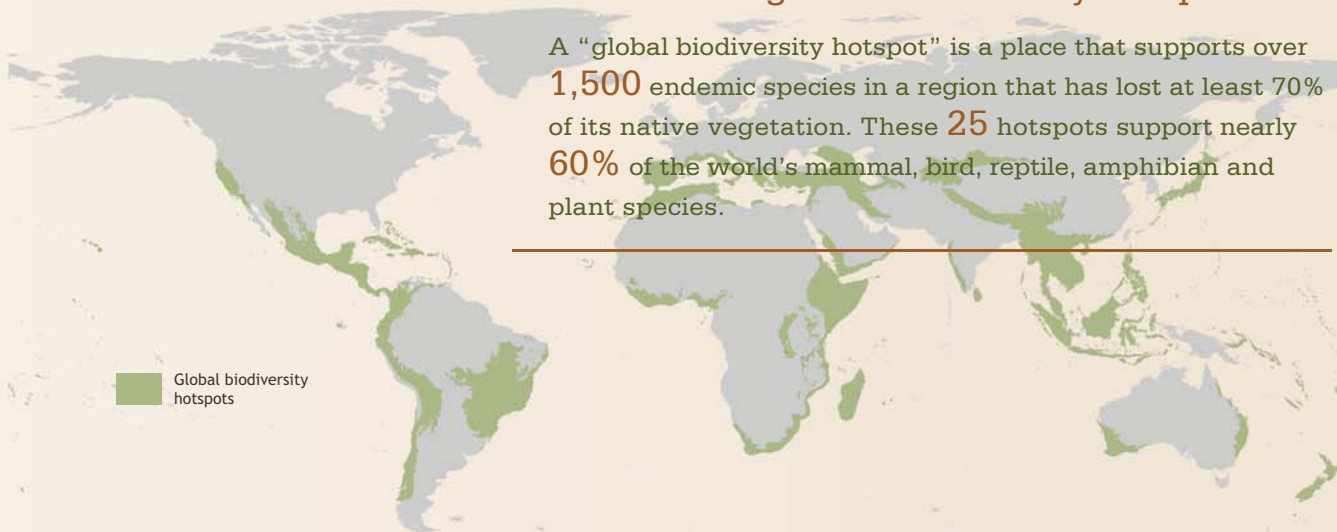
Midpen, along with private partners and other public agencies, has successfully protected much of our region’s precious greenbelt and baylands. However, many of the region’s plants, animals, lands and waterways are still at great risk. Within the Vision Plan Area:

- Nearly half of the region’s **89,315 acres** of sensitive plant communities are not protected,
- Half of the priority watersheds are not protected, and
- Native species compete with invasive species on **10,000 acres**.

The Vision Plan seeks to restore plant communities like redwood forests, repair ponds and creeks, and connect habitat. These priority actions will help plant and animal species adapt to a hotter and drier climate and will restore our wetlands, which will help protect human and wildlife communities from sea level rise.

**Midpen, along with most of California, is in one of 25 global biodiversity hotspots.**

A “global biodiversity hotspot” is a place that supports over **1,500** endemic species in a region that has lost at least 70% of its native vegetation. These **25** hotspots support nearly **60%** of the world’s mammal, bird, reptile, amphibian and plant species.



Portfolio Highlights:  
Connecting with Nature  
and Each Other



3

Develop volunteer steward program

Jack Gesehardt



11

Refurbish and add interpretive features to Deer Hollow Farm

Ken Lunder



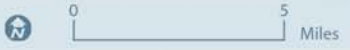
21

Provide interpretive educational services

Karl Gohl



- # Priority Action Portfolio # (Approximate location)
- Highlights: Family connections to nature
- Highlights: Cultural history interpretation
- Highlights: Volunteer stewardship program
- Highlights: Nature education center
- Midpen open space preserves
- Major city, county, state & federal parks, open space preserves, and publicly-owned watershed lands



# The Vision: Connecting with Nature and Each Other

*“Let’s get kids out from behind the computers and learning to enjoy the outdoors!”*

— Community Member

Throughout the community engagement process, people talked about nature as a means to achieve personal and social goals—to improve health and wellness, to be better parents, neighbors and community members, and to instill stewardship and curiosity in their own and future generations. They want more youth programs, family outreach and greater engagement with underserved communities. They want new and different ways to participate in open space as citizen scientists, volunteers and docents; and through the use of new technologies. They want all members of the community to lead fuller, happier and healthier lives through open space.

The Vision Plan features many ways to integrate nature into people’s lives.

- **3 preserves**, Skyline Ridge, Rancho San Antonio and Ravenswood, are ideal sites for interpretation and education centers,
- **9 preserves** can feature self-guided tours of the area’s rich stories about Native American ethnobotanists, early farmers and ranchers, the legacy of mining and logging, and a full array of natural history topics, and
- **5 potential family recreation sites** were identified where people of all ages and mobility levels can enjoy picture-perfect scenery, learn about the natural world, exercise and enjoy spending time in nature with friends and family members.

Long Ridge OSP by Jim Mosher



24

Family recreation and educational services

Jack Geschick



38

Partner to create Cooley Landing education center

Frances Freyberg



46

Enhance environmental education centers

Mippen Staff



50

Create family nature play programs

Jack Geschick

# The Vision: Viable Working Lands

*“Agriculture is healthy for the community and healthy for the land.”*

— Community Member



Enhance available water systems



Sustain large contiguous grasslands for conservation grazing



Foster connections to coastside rural heritage



San Mateo County’s coast is defined by its rural character and its rolling agricultural lands that contribute to the economy and a healthy, locally-sourced, food system. Midpen uses conservation grazing to enhance biodiversity, reduce fuel loads for fires, improve water systems, help sustain the local agricultural economy and foster the region’s rural heritage.

The Vision Plan supports viable working lands by providing contiguous grazing lands, improving ranchland infrastructure, and enhancing grassland health and water quality at four preserves. The Vision Plan would expand Midpen’s conservation grazing program by **an additional 1,500 acres** on existing lands.



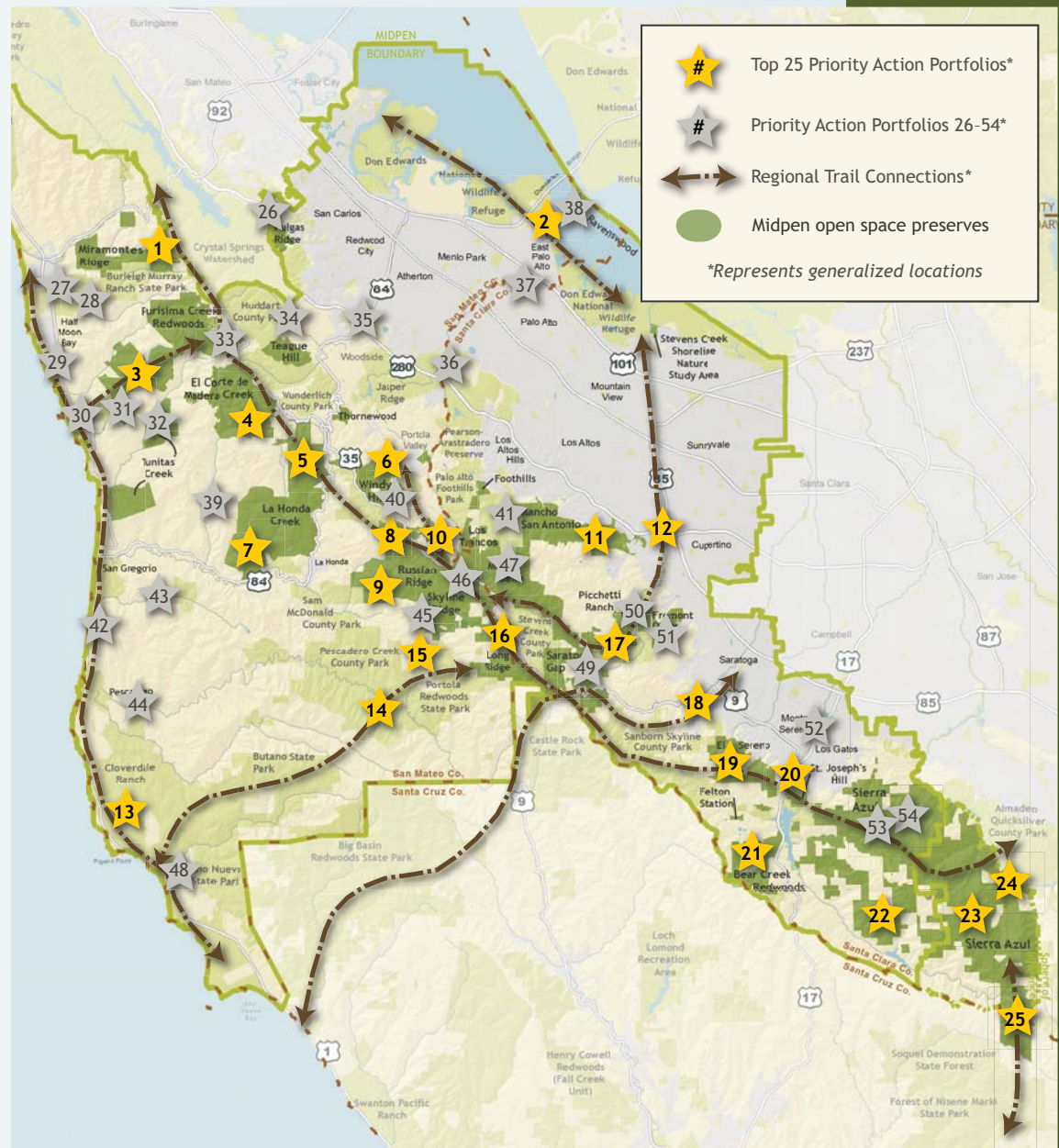


# Vision Plan Priority Action Portfolios

## Top 25 Portfolios

1. Open Miramontes Ridge
2. Build New Bayfront Trails
3. Complete the Purisima-to-Sea Trail
4. Build Walking, Hiking and Biking Trails at El Corte de Madera Creek
5. Open Upper La Honda Creek Preserve
6. Develop New Trails at Windy Hill
7. Open Driscoll Ranch Area at La Honda Creek
8. Preserve Upper San Gregorio Creek Watershed
9. Open New Trails at Russian Ridge
10. Re-Open Alpine Road at Coal Creek
11. Build Welcome Center at Rancho San Antonio
12. Complete Middle Stevens Creek Trail
13. Expand Grazing at Cloverdale Coastal Ranch
14. Open New Trails throughout the Redwoods
15. Protect More Redwood Forests
16. Create New Access Facilities at Long Ridge
17. Complete Upper Stevens Creek Trail
18. Complete Saratoga-to-Sea Trail
19. Open El Sereno Trails to Dogs and Complete Trail Connections
20. Preserve Safe Wildlife Corridors across Hwy. 17
21. Open Bear Creek Redwoods
22. Open Cathedral Oaks at Sierra Azul
23. Open Mount Umunhum at Sierra Azul
24. Open Rancho de Guadalupe at Sierra Azul
25. Open Loma Prieta Area at Sierra Azul

Visit [www.openspace.org/vision](http://www.openspace.org/vision) for full descriptions of all 54 Priority Action Portfolios.



# The Vision Plan Is

A living document that uses shared values and principles for open space planning.

A database of geographic information systems data that can be used for conservation planning throughout the Vision Plan Area.

A portrait of the region's incredible and diverse natural resources and people.

A model for civic engagement and organizational change.

A regional vision for open space in which all members of the community lead fuller and healthier lives through outdoor experiences and the appreciation of healthy plants, animals, lands and waterways.

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*“By listening to the collective wisdom of our community, we have, together, created a long-term vision for open space that protects the health of our lands, its wildlife and its people in perpetuity. In a time of changing climate, this is our contribution toward protecting our region’s life support system.”*

—Steve Abbors, General Manager

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# Acknowledgments

With thanks to everyone who participated in community conversations, focus groups, workshops, public meetings, the project web site, social media conversations and who supported the bond measure to realize the capital projects in the Top 25 Vision Plan portfolios.

## Board Members

Ward 1: Pete Siemens – Board Vice President (2014)  
Ward 2: Yoriko Kishimoto  
Ward 3: Jed Cyr  
Ward 4: Curt Riffle – Board Treasurer (2014)  
Ward 5: Nonette Hanko  
Ward 6: Larry Hassett – Board Secretary (2014)  
Ward 7: Cecily Harris – Board President (2014)

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Long Ridge OSP by Charles Tu

Complete Vision Plan Report, Conservation Atlas and Appendices:  
[www.openspace.org/Vision](http://www.openspace.org/Vision)

Measure AA Planning, Progress and News:  
[www.openspace.org/MeasureAA](http://www.openspace.org/MeasureAA)



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