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## New bridge and trail to expand public access at scenic South Bay open space preserve

The \$1.4 million project at Rancho Cañada del Oro aims to help seniors and others with limited access



The Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority will open a new trail and bridge over Llagas Creek at its Rancho Cañada del Oro Open Space Preserve on Saturday June 8, 2024. The \$1.4 million project is to provide new opportunities for people with limited access, including seniors and people in wheelchairs. (Photo: Annamarie Pilon, Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority)

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A prominent South Bay parks agency will open a \$1.4 million project Saturday that aims to make its lands more available for seniors, people in wheelchairs and others with limited mobility.

Officials from the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority, based in San Jose, plan to cut the ribbon on an 8-foot wide, 90-foot long new steel bridge at their [Rancho Cañada del Oro Open Space Preserve](#), located between San Jose and Morgan Hill near Calero Reservoir.

The bridge will allow hikers to cross Llagas Creek for the first time, extending the existing half-mile wheelchair-friendly Llagas Creek Loop Trail with a new 800-foot “Hidden Meadow Trail,” loop that features rest stops, benches and educational signage.

Not all visitors to the 5,675-acre preserve, where admission is free, can hike up and down steep hills, ride horses, or zip along on mountain bikes, planners say.

“Nature is here for everyone,” said Andrea Mackenzie, the open space agency’s general manager. “It has tremendous benefits for physical and mental health. It’s a great equalizer. We want to make sure nature is available for everybody.”

The agency plans to break ground later this year on a larger 3-mile-long accessibility trail at its Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve nearby.

Most of the funding for the project that will open Saturday, \$1.2 million, came from the California Department of Parks and Recreation, through a grant from Proposition 68, a \$4 billion parks bond approved by voters in 2018. The remaining \$200,000 came from the open space authority.

The preserve features 12 miles of trails and is known for its rolling grasslands, wildflowers and oak trees. It is home to deer, bobcats, and other wildlife. Recreation amenities include parking for cars and horse trailers, accessible restrooms, and picnic tables.

Among the officials expected to be on hand for Saturday’s celebration at 11 a.m., are members of [Bay Area Older Adults](#), a non-profit group based in San Jose that leads hikes and other outings for seniors at parks and open space preserves around the Bay Area.

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"As we get older, our worlds shrink, our abilities become challenged," she said. "It's harder to get out of the house. Older people are at higher risk for conditions like depression and anxiety. Being with people who have similar interests is a good way to make connections. You have a support network that isn't dependent on family members. And when you hike you are using your brain, and improving your balance and range of motion."

Among the group's recent events were a birding hike on the Sunnyvale Baylands, a walking history tour of downtown Walnut Creek, and a wildflower hike at Pulgas Ridge Open Space Preserve in the hills along Interstate 280 near Redwood City.

"We tell ourselves about our limitations, and believe that's true sometimes," von Kugelgen said. "Having arranged outings — where all you have to do is show up with your sunscreen and water bottle — removes a lot of the barriers."

The open space authority was established in 1993 through a law signed by former Gov. Pete Wilson. It is funded largely by voter-approved property taxes. Over the past 30 years, it has preserved 14 properties totaling 30,000 acres in Santa Clara County, with particular emphasis in the Coyote Valley area, and hillsides overlooking San Jose and Morgan Hill.

Mackenzie said that later this year, 5 miles of trails in the Rancho Cañada del Oro Open Space Preserve — which is made up of several former cattle ranches — will become part of the Bay Area Ridge Trail. The new bridge also will allow the agency to build trails on the southern parts of the property in the months and years ahead for hikers, bicyclists and horse riders.

"Rancho is a gem," she said. "It feels like wilderness. We want it available to everyone regardless of their abilities."

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