

FYI

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Nonprofits team up to promote agriculture in Coyote Valley

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The Santa Clara County Open Space Authority and the nonprofit Sustainable Agriculture Education (SAGE) are teaming up to save portions of the 7,500-acre Coyote Valley from development and foster increased agricultural use for current farmers and a new generation of growers and ranchers, according to a press release from the OSA.

The revitalized effort to preserve the valley just north of Morgan Hill as open space, and for recreational and agricultural uses, was bolstered by the OSA's purchase in 2010 of a 348-acre swath of the valley's western edge for preservation efforts, the press release said. The OSA is currently in the process of developing a recreational and agricultural use plan for that preserve.

And this preservation is a stark contrast from the outlook of Coyote Valley's future just five years ago, when it looked like the entire valley was destined to be plowed under and paved over for more housing and commercial projects, according to OSA staff. The Great Recession was the "ironic hero" in the valley's future, as the City of San Jose's plan to bring technology campuses and medium-density housing to Coyote Valley were shattered by the housing and credit market crash.

Now all development plans in Coyote Valley's "urban reserve" are on hold until after 2040 due to revisions to the City of San Jose's General Plan, the OSA press release said.

Earlier this year, the OSA has approved a management plan for the 348-acre Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve to support the land's rural and agricultural traditions. The plan includes conservation and stewardship, and development of multi-use trails for equestrian, hiking and cycling users.

The partnership with SAGE was a "natural fit," OSA staff said. Founded in 2001, SAGE develops urban-edge agricultural parks and agricultural resource areas that support local food systems. Last September, SAGE won a \$252,000 grant from the California Department of Food and Agriculture to help revitalize "specialty crop agriculture" in the Coyote Valley.

"The Open Space Authority is excited to work with SAGE to help revitalize the rich agricultural heritage of the Coyote Valley and contribute to local community health," said OSA General Manager Andrea Mackenzie. "The Coyote Valley helps maintain the region's clean air and fresh drinking water, offers families great outdoor recreation opportunities, and, through this partnership, will support local production of healthy crops such as fruits and vegetables for local consumption."

Activities anticipated from the use of SAGE's grant funds include workshops and technical assistance for current and new growers in the Coyote Valley who want to increase production of specialty crops

and the adoption of sustainable farming practices, according to OSA staff.

SAGE hopes to create a 40-acre demonstration and education farm in the Coyote preserve that will showcase natural resource conservation practices, trial new crops and eventually offer small plots for start-up farmers. The long-term vision is to create a permanent agricultural resource area that will help support livelihoods for farmers.

“We want to see family farmers making a better living and we think growing for local markets and using more sustainable practices can help them do so,” explained Sibella Kraus, President of SAGE. “We also want to support people who want to start farming - young people, immigrants and scaling-up urban gardeners - and help them succeed.”

During the first three years, the OSA and SAGE will work to leverage the grant funding to raise more public and philanthropic funding to be invested in farmland protection and a new type of diversified, sustainable agriculture in the Coyote Valley, OSA staff said.

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OPEN SPACE SO CLOSE TO HOME

Buck, Rancho Cañada del Oro Open Space Preserve. Photo from a remote trail camera.

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Open Space...

SO CLOSE TO HOME

By Mary Gottschalk



As Open Space Authority Santa Clara Valley starts its third decade it can look back with satisfaction on 20 years of protecting open space, water quality, iconic landscapes and working lands within Santa Clara County.

Open spaces as beautiful as most National Parks and where it's hard to believe that more than 1 million people reside within in a short drive.

There is Rancho Canada Del Oro in South Santa Clara County—a 3,882-acre preserve with more than eight miles of connected trails open year-round to hikers, equestrians and, to a limited extent, bicyclists.

The paved, half-mile Llagas Creek Loop Trail within Canada Del Oro is an easy stroll for hikers and those in wheelchairs through a meadow of birds, deer, wildflowers, native grasses and trees.

Then there is Sierra Vista Open Space Preserve—1,676 acres of oak woods, grasslands and chaparral that is home to protected wildlife, including golden eagle, tiger salamander, red-legged frog, bobcat, mountain lion, grey fox and the Bay Checkerspot butterfly.

There are 10 miles of trails in Sierra Vista and it is part of the Bay Area Ridge Trail that will eventually encircle San Francisco Bay with 550 miles of trails.

Most popular is the 2.7-mile Boccardo Trail, open year-round to hikers, bicyclists and equestrians.

Unlike the Llagas Creek Loop Trail, the Boccardo Trail is classified as moderate to strenuous and offers little in the way of shade.

Opening later this year is Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve—348 acres with 4.15 miles of trails, including a loop trail and a half-mile wheelchair accessible trail. These trails will accommodate hikers, bicyclists and equestrians.

On May 10 the Coyote Valley Family Farm Feast will offer attendees a chance to preview the preserve and enjoy local farm fresh foods. The event is free and reservations can be made on the website.

The Open Space Authority was created on Feb. 1, 1993, following the passage of SB2027, which established it but provided no funding.

In 1994 a permanent governing board was created and an assessment district formed.

Homeowners as well as commercial and industrial property owners throughout the county now contribute to the Authority, providing annual revenues of \$4 million. Those funds are leveraged through grants, private donations and partnerships with other agencies.

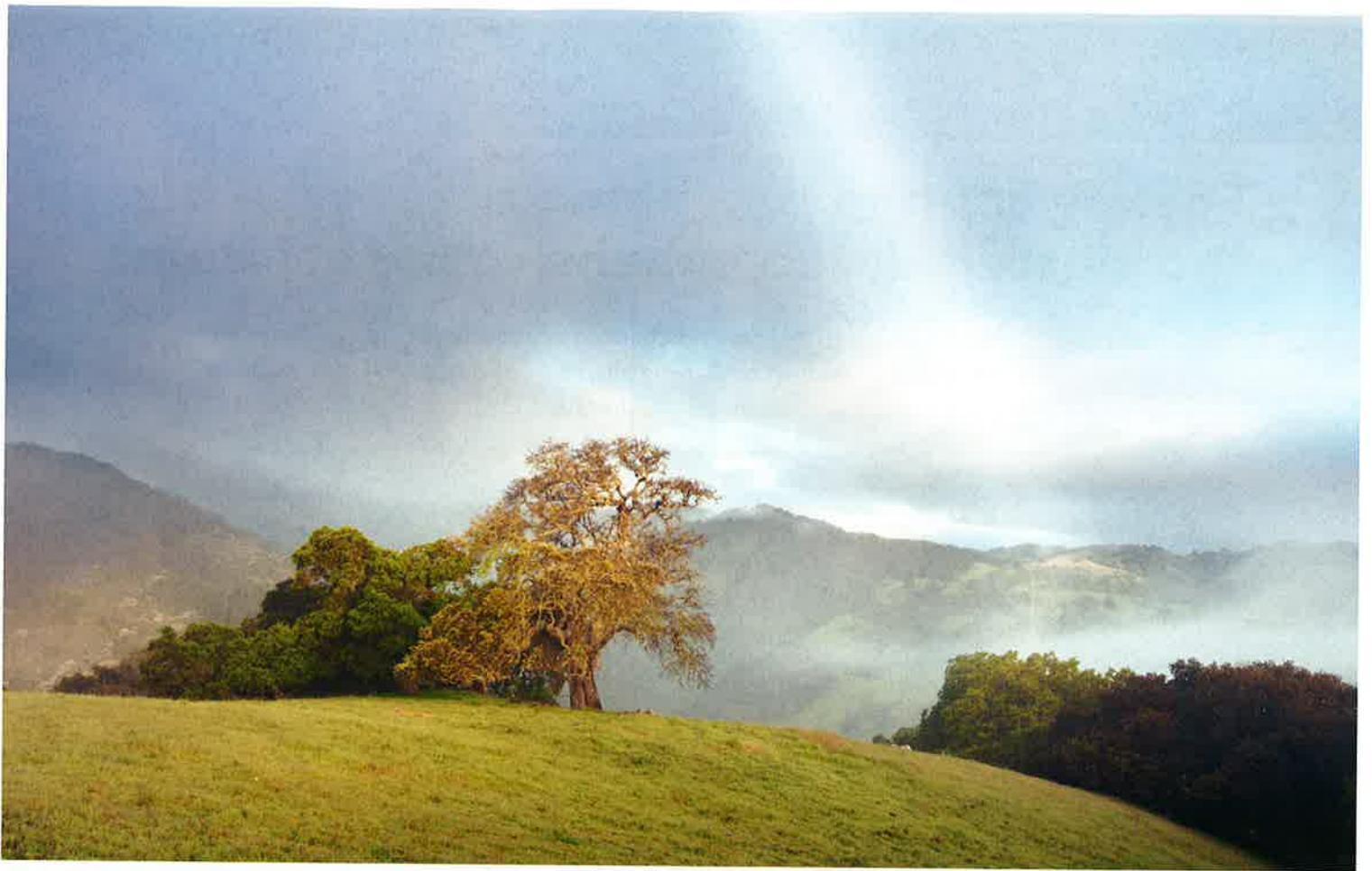
In addition to acquiring open space for all to use, OSA has given monetary support for urban open space projects like trails or parks to the cities of San Jose, Santa Clara, Milpitas, Campbell and Morgan Hill. They also collaborated with Peninsula Open Space Trust to purchase three pieces of property totaling 325 acres.

Interestingly, OSA is committed not only to the preservation of open space, but also to agriculture.

Trails and facilities are open year-round, except for periods of heavy rain, and hikers are welcome on all of them, but not dogs or other pets.

Visit openspaceauthority.org for maps, directions and guidelines for enjoying the trails and open space. There are also regularly scheduled guided hikes as well as special activities such as bird counts, wildflower walks, stargazing sessions, photography walks and both bicycle and equestrian rides listed on the site.

And all activities are free.



Photographs on opposite page: top, wildflowers, Coyote Valley Open Space Reserve; center, Bay checkerspot butterfly, Coyote Valley Open Space Reserve; bottom, Mayfair Ranch Trail, Rancho Canada Del Oro. This page, top, Rancho Canada Del Oro and bottom, Coyote Valley Open Space Reserve. All photographs by Derek Neumann.