

# Construction of Arana Gulch paths could start this month

Opponents worried about 'blank check' for \$5 million plan



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL FILE

Participants in a 2012 installment of the Live Oak Summer Walk series had an opportunity to see some of the lesser-known areas of Arana Gulch.

*Greenbelt*  
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✓ SANTA CRUZ — Santa Cruz city officials anticipate breaking ground in late October on a long-delayed multiuse trail project for Arana Gulch.

Last month, the city accepted a \$4.9 million construction contract with San Francisco firm ProVen, which submitted the lowest of six bids to create the Broadway-Brommer Bicycle Pedestrian Pathway that will crisscross the 68-acre greenbelt above the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor. Design of the two-mile-long system is complete, but there is only enough funding to cover a 5 percent construction contingency of nearly \$250,000, rather than the standard 10 percent.

"In many cases, that's sufficient," said Chris Schreiber, assistant director of public works. "You can only design so much, and it doesn't always fit what is out in the field."

SEE PATHS ON A4

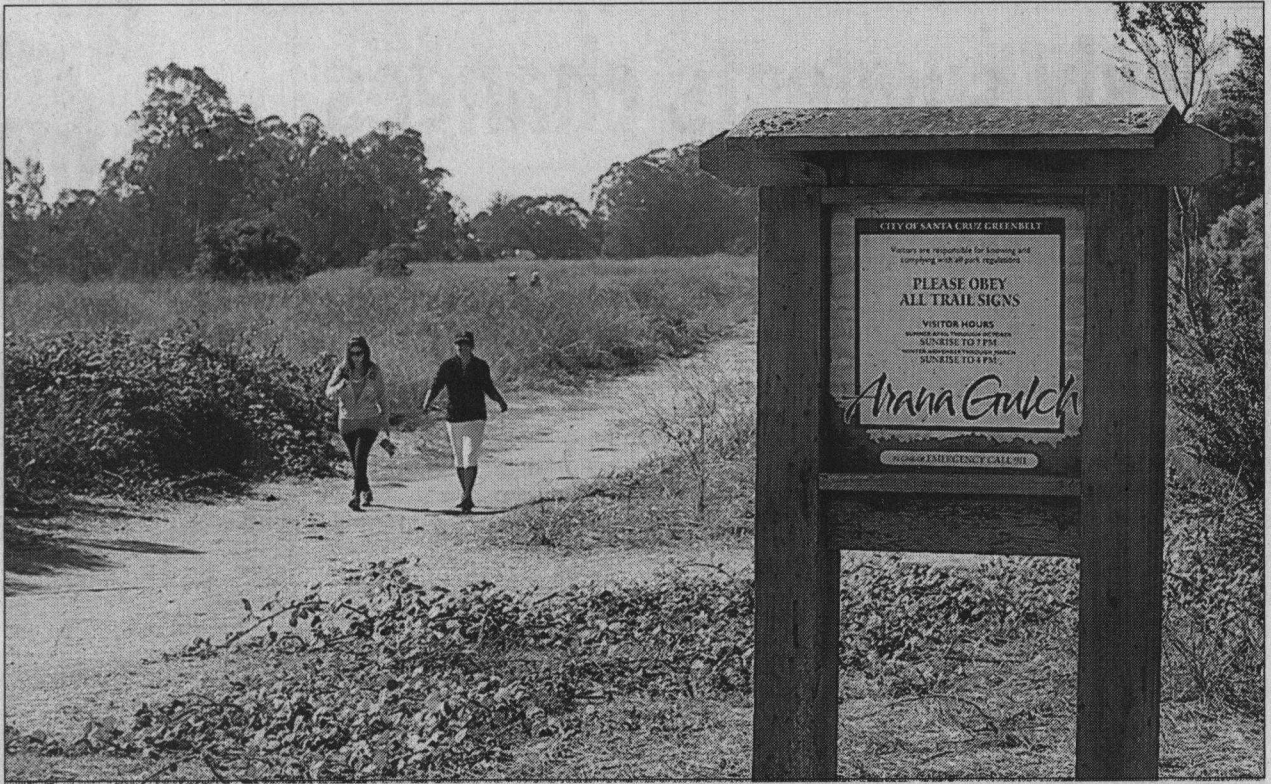


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Historian Norman Poitevin, third from right, leads a walk through Arana Gulch last year.

10.9.13





DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Santa Cruz will start constructing a new trail system through Arana Gulch later this month.

## PATHS

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The California Coastal Commission agreed in December 2011 to allow the bike and pedestrian paths as part of an overall restoration plan for Arana Gulch, which contains sensitive habitat for the endangered Santa Cruz tarplant. The commission has yet to issue a permit, but Schneider said the city will address some outstanding habitat management concerns and get a permit soon.

On Sept. 24, the City Council approved receipt of

state and regional funds for the project, which also will require alternative transportation funds from the city to complete. Schneider warned more money will be needed if costs run over, but said the city could apply for additional grants.

Opponents of the project, which will connect Broadway to Brommer Street, believe the paths and two new foot bridges will further degrade the tarplant's habitat. Friends of Arana Gulch and the California Native Plant Society worked for years to halt the project city leaders and bicycling advocates say will be a critical alternative for nonmotorists between

Santa Cruz and Live Oak.

Jean Brocklebank, a member of Friends of Arana Gulch, told the council she remained concerned the city is tapping transportation dollars at the expense of sidewalk repair and other improvements. She said the unknown costs ahead also are troubling.

"We think it is a bad idea to write public works what amounts to a blank check for a project that is still not adequately defined in terms of exactly how much the project is ultimately going to cost," she said.

The city acquired the former dairy property in 1995. The number of tarplants

declined from more than 100,000 in the mid-1980s to 32 in 2011 due to a decline in grazing, invasive plant species and "unmanaged public access," according to Coastal Commission staff.

Then-Coastal Commissioner Mark Stone, a Scotts Valley resident now serving in the state Assembly, voted in favor of the project after raising numerous concerns during a previous hearing. He said the city's willingness to realign trails away from the most sensitive tarplant areas improved the plan.

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