

# Trails open in greenbelt preserve

## Greenbelt Moore Creek Preserve

**WHAT:** 2.5 miles of trails on 246 acres.

**WHERE:** Entrances off Highway 1 across from Shaffer Road, and Meder Street's end. No trails link entrances. Limited parking.

**HOURS:** April-October, sunrise to 7 p.m. November-March, sunrise to 4 p.m.

**ACTIVITIES:** Hiking only; no dogs, bikes, camping, fires, hunting or collecting plants or animals.

**TOURS:** Contact the Natural History Museum, 420-6115.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:** A brochure including a trail map is available from the Parks and Recreation Department; 420-5270; [www.santacruzparksandrec.com](http://www.santacruzparksandrec.com).

By JYLLIAN KEMSLEY  
SENTINEL CORRESPONDENT

SANTA CRUZ — The centerpiece in two decades of development battles, the Moore Creek Preserve will open without fanfare April 11.

The 246-acre preserve on the western edge of Santa Cruz, formerly known as the Bombay property, was bought by the city in 1998 for \$3.9 million. Ancient oaks, wildflower meadows and ephemeral spring pools can be explored on 2.5 miles of trails overlooking Natural Bridges State Beach and Younger Lagoon.

"Getting the funding for the Bombay property was one of the most tense and aggressive efforts we've made for environmental preservation in Santa Cruz," said state Sen. Bruce McPherson. "I think the people of Santa Cruz need to be given

credit for having the vision to say, 'This is what we need to do this.'"

The saga began when Santa Cruz voters passed Measure O in 1979, a temporary moratorium on development. The lands affected were on the north, east and west sides of town.

The Teachers Management Investment Group sold its 250-acre parcel north of town to the Bombay Corp. in the late 1980s, setting off several years of discussion with the City Council about its development.

One 1994 proposal was for 10 luxury houses with horse stables and corrals on 13 acres. Other proposals in 1997 were for either 15 or 25 homes on 50 acres.

Although the city had considered buying the land earlier, purchase efforts

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Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

The Prairie View Trail begins near Highway 1 and Shaffer Road.

## Greenbelt: City's Moore Creek Preserve opens to hikers

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began in earnest in 1997. The City Council started the fund with \$1 million. The Public Land Trust secured \$250,000 from the state Department of Transportation's Enhancement and Mitigation Program. McPherson and former Assemblyman Fred Keeley lobbied then-Gov. Pete Wilson for \$1 million from the state, along with funds to purchase Coast Dairies lands on the North Coast.

The final piece of the puzzle fell into place in November 1998, when voters passed a \$1.65 million bond measure for the land.

"The passage of Measure G was the completion of the process," said Celia Scott, mayor when the measure passed. "That was the last greenbelt property to be acquired."

The preserve now operates under state Wildlife Conservation Board rules permanently forbidding development.

The city Parks and Recreation Department worked with the

Land Trust of Santa Cruz County and the Wildlife Conservation Board to develop an interim management plan, completed in April 2002.

Since then, the agencies have continued to work together to ready the property for the public.

"We're opening it on a phased basis," said Susan Harris, a planner for the Parks Department. "We wanted to open in spring because of the wildflower fields."

"When you get on the property and begin to walk up the meadows, your vistas of the ocean and your recognition of where you are relative to Santa Cruz are really quite stunning," said Laura Perry, executive director of the Land Trust of Santa Cruz County.

The park will be open to hikers only — dogs and bikes are prohibited. This is in part to protect species such as the endangered Ohlone tiger beetle and San Francisco popcornflower, and the threatened California red-legged frog.

The preserve has been accessi-

ble since 1999 on spring tours given through the Natural History Museum.

"I've got two favorite spots," said tour guide Doug Petersen. "There's a vernal pond back there, up on the top of the hill. It's neat because we go up every couple of weeks and you get to watch what happens to the animals and plants around it as it dries up."

"My other favorite is a beautiful huge oak tree up on the top of the property," he said.

There's no grand opening planned, said planner Harris, because of site constraints and limited parking. The only parking available is across the street from main entrance at Highway 1 and Shaffer Road. Bike racks should be installed within the next few weeks.

Other improvements planned are a trail from the west to the east side of the property, including a bridge over Moore Creek, which officials hope to have in place by the end of 2003.

But amenities such as parking

and bathrooms will have to wait for a long-term management plan. There are no plans to tackle that project, said Councilman Mike Rotkin, primarily because of the city's budget crisis.

"It's just a question of money, either to plan it or to implement it," Rotkin said. "There's no point in rushing ahead to do a great plan when you don't have the people to carry it out."

Rotkin, who was also a council member during many of the development debates, emphasized that Santa Cruz is unique for its greenbelt. He noted that the 1964 general plan called for 10,000 homes between Santa Cruz and Davenport.

"Sometimes we take it for granted, but if it were easy to do, a lot of cities would have done it, and they haven't," he said. "I think this was actually an incredible thing to do, and it made a huge difference in terms of being an environmentally friendly city."

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Officials wanted to open the hiking trails in the Moore Creek preserve on the city's Westside as the spring wildflowers were blooming, like these California poppies, which greet hikers in the greenbelt land.

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