

**FRIENDS OF EDGEWOOD NATURAL PRESERVE**



**Strategic Plan  
2009 - 2012**

**October 2008**

## Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary .....	1-1
Introduction.....	1-1
Vision .....	1-2
Mission .....	1-2
Values .....	1-2
Strategic Priorities .....	1-2
Summary of Work Plan for 2009 .....	1-3
2. Background on Edgewood Natural Preserve and its Friends.....	2-1
History of Edgewood.....	2-1
History of the Friends of Edgewood .....	2-2
Locator Map for Edgewood Natural Preserve.....	2-5
Trail Map of Edgewood Natural Preserve .....	2-6
3. Strategic Plan Process.....	3-1
Defining the Need .....	3-1
Kicking Off the Process.....	3-1
Writing the Strategic Plan.....	3-1
Work Group Planning Process .....	3-2
Acknowledgements .....	3-2
Participants.....	3-3
4. Contact Information .....	4-1

## Table of Figures

Figure 1 Locator Map.....	2-5
Figure 2 Trails Map.....	2-6



# 1. Executive Summary

## Introduction

Edgewood County Park and Natural Preserve is one of more than a dozen parks managed by the San Mateo County Department of Parks. Although it is flanked on three sides by suburban neighborhoods in San Carlos and Redwood City, Edgewood's lands remain free from development. And because of its varying topography and geology, most notably the presence of serpentine-rich soils, Edgewood hosts a remarkable diversity of plants. In less than a square mile, well over 500 different plant species thrive, three of which are federally listed as endangered or threatened. Edgewood has also been home to the threatened Bay checkerspot butterfly.

For many people, dazzling springtime wildflower displays are Edgewood's greatest appeal. Early rains followed by sunny, spring days provide the conditions for native wildflowers to transform the serpentine grasslands into carpets of yellow and gold, accented with orange, blue and pink hues.

Ever since European settlement, changes caused by human activities have threatened the health of Edgewood's natural communities. In 1993, the County Board of Supervisors designated Edgewood a natural preserve, permanently ending any development prospects. But Edgewood's ecology remains under attack by invasive species, primarily weeds, that threaten its biodiversity. Non-native grasses have crowded out the Bay Checkerspot's main host plant and are therefore largely responsible for the butterfly's disappearance from Edgewood.

## Enter the Friends

The Friends of Edgewood Natural Preserve was founded in 1993 as a volunteer organization to preserve, protect, and restore Edgewood's ecosystem. Working closely with members of the Santa Clara Valley chapter of the California Native Plant Society and in cooperation with the San Mateo County Department of Parks, the Friends focused initially on promoting habitat restoration at Edgewood. Over time, we broadened our mission to incorporate nature interpretation and education, initially offering docent-led springtime walks, and later, expanding to a program of field trips for area school children.

Now, the Friends is a 501(c)(3) public-benefit corporation with more than 200 member households. We are well regarded in the community for the interpretive and habitat management services we provide. Our docents guide several hundred visitors of all ages through the Preserve every year. We also publish an impressive quarterly newsletter and maintain an informative website.

As County budgets have dwindled, the Friends organization has stepped up its leadership in caring for Edgewood's natural resources, while still interpreting them for the public. Edgewood's Interpretive

Center will be an additional asset for our region, and its anticipated opening provides new and exciting challenges for the Friends.

However, these roles and responsibilities are taxing our current organizational capacity. In 2008 we recognized that our active volunteer corps was losing ground relative to the increasing demands. We knew we needed to re-focus and reinvent our organization to address these challenges. So we re-examined our vision, mission, values, and strategic priorities, and developed this Strategic Plan.

The balance of this section summarizes our Strategic Plan and highlights our work plan for the next few years. The full document describes in greater depth the history of Edgewood and of the Friends, and provides detailed work plans aimed at enabling us to accomplish our mission and approach our vision.

## **Vision**

We envision restoring and preserving Edgewood's ecosystem as an exceptional habitat for native plants and animals, and providing outstanding natural history programs so that visitors of all ages can appreciate, respect, support, and be inspired by Edgewood.

## **Mission**

The Friends of Edgewood Natural Preserve exists to protect and celebrate Edgewood as a unique treasure by promoting exemplary stewardship, and by reaching out with informative public programs.

## **Values**

Our volunteer-driven organization believes in and fosters the values of environmental stewardship:

- Respecting the beauty and diversity of Edgewood's flora and fauna
- Engaging organizations and communities in preserving and restoring the ecosystem
- Educating ourselves and the public about current ecological science
- Kindling people's love of nature and inviting their participation and support
- Advocating on behalf of Edgewood

## **Strategic Priorities**

Restore, preserve, and protect Edgewood's natural resources

- Drive effort for developing an Integrated Resource Management Plan for Edgewood.
- Strengthen support for community involvement in restoration, preservation, and protection activities.

- Leverage funding opportunities to promote restoration, preservation, and protection activities.

### Inspire stewardship of Edgewood by offering educational and interpretive natural history programs for people of all ages

- Define our relationship with the San Mateo County Parks Department and the San Mateo County Parks Foundation in supporting Edgewood's Interpretive Center.
- Develop and execute a plan to utilize the Interpretive Center to enhance our educational and interpretive programs.
- Continue investment in docent-led walks, school field trips, and other ongoing interpretive programs.

### Strengthen organizational infrastructure to better support our mission

- Nurture current volunteers and cultivate additional volunteers: recruit, recognize, retain.
- Develop a system for program reviews so that we can assess the relative value of current programs, expansion of current programs, and proposed new programs
- Solidify relationships with current partners and develop new partnerships to leverage our resources
- Formalize our financial management methods and processes.
- Improve our membership information management system.
- Develop our records management system.
- Create governance collateral materials.

## Summary of Work Plan for 2009

During the first year of implementation of our Strategic Plan, we will focus on the following activities:

- **Infrastructure.** Formalize committees (Programs, Volunteers, Interpretive Center (IC), Finance, Governance) to implement the work plans. Produce the first edition of the governance manual.
- **Interpretive Center.** Establish the Memo of Understanding (MOU) as well as the Friends of Edgewood liaison role, and follow the 2009 timeline.
- **Preservation / Restoration.** Initiate the effort to produce an Integrated Resource Management Plan.
- **Programs.** Institutionalize the evaluation form process for all current and new programs and events.
- **Volunteers.** Establish a comprehensive volunteer recruitment, retention, and recognition plan.

## 2. Background on Edgewood Natural Preserve and its Friends

### History of Edgewood

A treasure lies fully exposed next to Interstate 280, between Redwood City and San Carlos, in San Mateo County. Edgewood County Park and Natural Preserve is a gift — of nature, of historical happenstance, of the advocates who fought to save it, and of the guardians who labor to restore it.

### The Early Years

For millennia, this area supported a typical California foothill grassland. But there's a difference between grass and a grassland. Here, like elsewhere in the state, vibrant wildflower displays splashed over the hills in spring. Ohlone Indians managed land throughout the Bay Area and lived nearby, if not right here. Then in the 1700s, the Spanish divided the region into land grants, and imported European grasses for cattle forage. These exotic grasses spread, crowding out native plants, and forever altered California's grasslands. All over the state, invasive grasses began muting, even erasing, the native wildflower show.

But here, hilly terrain and unusual soil rendered the land unsuitable for farming or ranching, and helped hold invasive grasses at bay. Spectacular wildflower carpets continued, thanks to serpentine, California's State Rock. Serpentine soils make up less than one percent of California's soils, but nearly forty percent of Edgewood. Over evolutionary time, many native plants adapted to serpentine's bizarre chemistry. But alien plants can't cope, so this "serpentine time machine" preserved a glimpse of California's floral bounty as it faded elsewhere.

### Close Calls with Construction

The property remained mostly undeveloped until 1891, when John Issac built a two-story house (demolished in the 1980s) at what is now the picnic area. After an intermediate owner, Henry Finkler and his wife purchased the property in 1908. Finkler's weather records led to a prize-winning slogan — still in use today — in a Chamber of Commerce promotion that declared Redwood City to have "Climate Best by Government Test." Plans to subdivide were dropped when Mrs. Finkler became ill. The Taylor family next took ownership, and held the property from the 1930s, through the mid-century building boom, until 1967, when the State of California exercised its right of eminent domain to obtain the site for a proposed Edgewood Hills State College.

The State abandoned that plan in 1980 and sold the site as surplus property for about \$2 million to San Mateo County. With the encouragement of an initial grant of about half the money from the

Federal Secretary of the Interior's contingency fund, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District stepped forward and agreed to share the remaining cost with San Mateo County in a joint acquisition. More than ten years of controversy ensued. While Edgewood's future lingered in uncertainty, trespassers on off-road vehicles intruded, with lasting consequences. Scars, now more than 40 years old, still remain obvious on many of Edgewood's hillsides, especially in summer.

Development proposals included a recreational complex, a solar energy facility, and a golf course, which generated considerable debate, prompting the California Native Plant Society to file suit to prevent destruction of sensitive habitats. The suit was settled out of court but threats remained. To preserve the rare biological treasures that were still being discovered, more than forty local conservation groups and twelve businesses formed the Save Edgewood Park. Edgewood harbors two state and federally listed endangered plant species, one federally listed threatened plant species, and several more plant species of special concern. In 1987, the Bay Checkerspot butterfly was listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act. Edgewood advocates also fought off a second golf-course proposal, gathering more than 11,000 signatures in support of preserving the area.

## A Preserve for the Future

Finally, in the summer of 1993 the County Board of Supervisors unanimously declared Edgewood County Park a Natural Preserve in perpetuity, protecting it from development. Edgewood remains the only natural preserve in the San Mateo County Parks system. The Master Plan was completely revised, and adopted in 1997. Protection, preservation, and restoration of Edgewood's natural resources became the primary management objectives. Now more than 50,000 annual visitors stretch their bodies, minds, and spirits as they enjoy Edgewood's flora, fauna, and expansive vistas.

Edgewood's future remains uncertain, however. Current legal protections have little power to thwart a growing assault that encourages invasive grasses to threaten native plants even on serpentine soils, and has therefore faded Edgewood's once-showy wildflower carpets, and extirpated its famous butterfly. Vehicles on nearby Interstate 280 are essentially fertilizing the soil with their exhaust—specifically nitrogen, normally a limiting nutrient in serpentine soil. This atmospheric nitrogen deposition is a global problem, contributing to degraded habitats worldwide. Now, the Bay Checkerspot clings to existence with only one other home on Earth (in Santa Clara County), but scientists are attempting to re-introduce the butterfly here. Their work shows that merely setting aside land no longer suffices to preserve species and native habitats. The battle to preserve breathtaking wildflower displays has shifted to a struggle to restore them — and the butterfly that thrives on them. Edgewood has entered a new chapter, now with connections reaching not only to our county and state, but to the world beyond, and it needs Friends as much as ever.

## History of the Friends of Edgewood

The nuances and worth of a special gift are not always immediately obvious to fortunate but unknowing recipients. People sometimes need help to truly appreciate a complex treasure, so they can

cherish the gift and pass it along intact to future generations. Helping to make those connections is what Friends are for.

The Friends of Edgewood Natural Preserve grew out of the grassroots coalition that arose to preserve Edgewood and its biological heritage. To help raise public awareness about what was at risk, the California Native Plant Society began offering docent-led wildflower walks. The Friends later took on that task, and the ongoing wildflower walks remain extremely popular. From its lively beginnings, the Friends has grown in membership as well as in stature within the community. Edgewood's special beauty and rarity, as well as its many near escapes, continue to stimulate strong community feeling for protecting it. Now more than 200 families revere Edgewood, donating their time, energy, and money to help provide ongoing stewardship for the Preserve's natural resources.

Founded in 1993, the same year Edgewood became a natural preserve, the organization was granted nonprofit corporate status in November 1997. Each year Friends volunteers donate over 3,000 hours and are involved with Edgewood and the local community in numerous activities. Ongoing programs include:

- **Leading wildflower walks.** Every weekend morning from mid-March to June, docents guide visitors on walks through the Preserve. Groups also request walks at other times, sometimes emphasizing specific interests. Hundreds of visitors from around the Bay Area and beyond enjoy our docent-led walks every year.
- **Recruiting and training docents to lead walks.** Training combines classroom natural history presentations with hikes in the field led by experts in various sciences. Youth outreach docents receive guidance in leading children's walks.
- **Sharing nature with children.** Our youth outreach docents offer interactive field trips year-round to local schools, home-schooled students, and scouting groups, often oriented to specific subjects they are learning about. We guided almost 500 children through the preserve last year.
- **Promoting habitat restoration.** We work closely with the California Native Plant Society, our County Department of Parks, and our county's Weed Management Area partners to remove invasive non-native plants in the best ways feasible—from hand pulling to tractor mowing.
- **Mapping natural resources of Edgewood.** Geographic Information System and Global Positioning System technologies enable us to monitor the location and extent of rare plants, and track weed management progress, as well as provide clear and accurate trail maps.
- **Developing a website for plant location and identification.** Built on a database of photographs and plant classification, this interactive tool helps people learn about Edgewood's flora.
- **Planning and developing an Interpretive Center for Edgewood.** We have worked closely with the San Mateo County Parks Foundation in the design and fundraising phases, and with the San Mateo County Department of Parks to plan for operations.
- **Caltrans Adopt-A-Highway Program.** Since we began in 1999, we've removed over 100 bags of trash annually from the northbound section of Interstate 280 adjacent to Edgewood.



- **Advocating on local issues affecting Edgewood.** We have supported numerous environmental and parks-related ballot measures.

Other partnership programs or shorter-term events include:

- **Butterfly re-introduction.** The Friends produced a brochure to educate visitors about the plight of the Bay Checkerspot butterfly and the re-introduction efforts, assisted scientists with butterfly counts, and helped the “media event” run smoothly.
- **Volunteer Trail Patrol.** Participants in this year-round, County-run program educate visitors about the Preserve and the rules for preventing damage to it, as well as help them find their way. Trail Patrol volunteers serve as the “eyes and ears” of the County parks, observing and reporting on trail use and conditions.
- **Expressions of Edgewood Photo Contest.** In 2002, two dozen amateur photographers entered nature photos taken at Edgewood. A panel of professional photographers selected the top 16 photos, which were displayed for three months in the rotunda of the San Mateo County History Museum.
- **Ecological Societies field trip.** Dozens of scientists from around the world who attended the 2007 Ecological Society of America and Society for Ecological Restoration joint conference in San Jose signed up for an educational hike and work project at Edgewood.
- **County Weed Management Area.** The Friends of Edgewood is a founding member of our county’s Weed Management Area and actively supports weed management across our county. Our active participation has benefited Edgewood with awards of almost \$60,000 in grants to support weed management.
- **Endangered Species Day** event with the Sequoia Chapter of the Audubon Society. The Friends enthusiastically participated in the public presentation and subsequent guided hike at Edgewood to showcase the importance of protecting species through the Endangered Species Act.
- **Powers of 10 Celebration.** We commemorated our 10th anniversary with booths, presentations, music, and free ice cream sundaes at Edgewood’s Day Camp. Fifty guests enjoyed the party and learned about 10 ways the Friends have made a difference at Edgewood.

In recognition of its efforts, the Friends of Edgewood won the San Mateo County Sustainability Award for 2001. The award is presented to individuals or organizations that promote sustainability as evidenced by actions addressing healthy ecosystems, economic vitality, and social equity. The organization has also received several ecologically oriented grants focused on habitat restoration. The Friends of Edgewood, marking its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2008, remains committed to celebrating the treasure that is Edgewood and protecting it for the plant, animal and human generations to come.

# Locator Map for Edgewood Natural Preserve

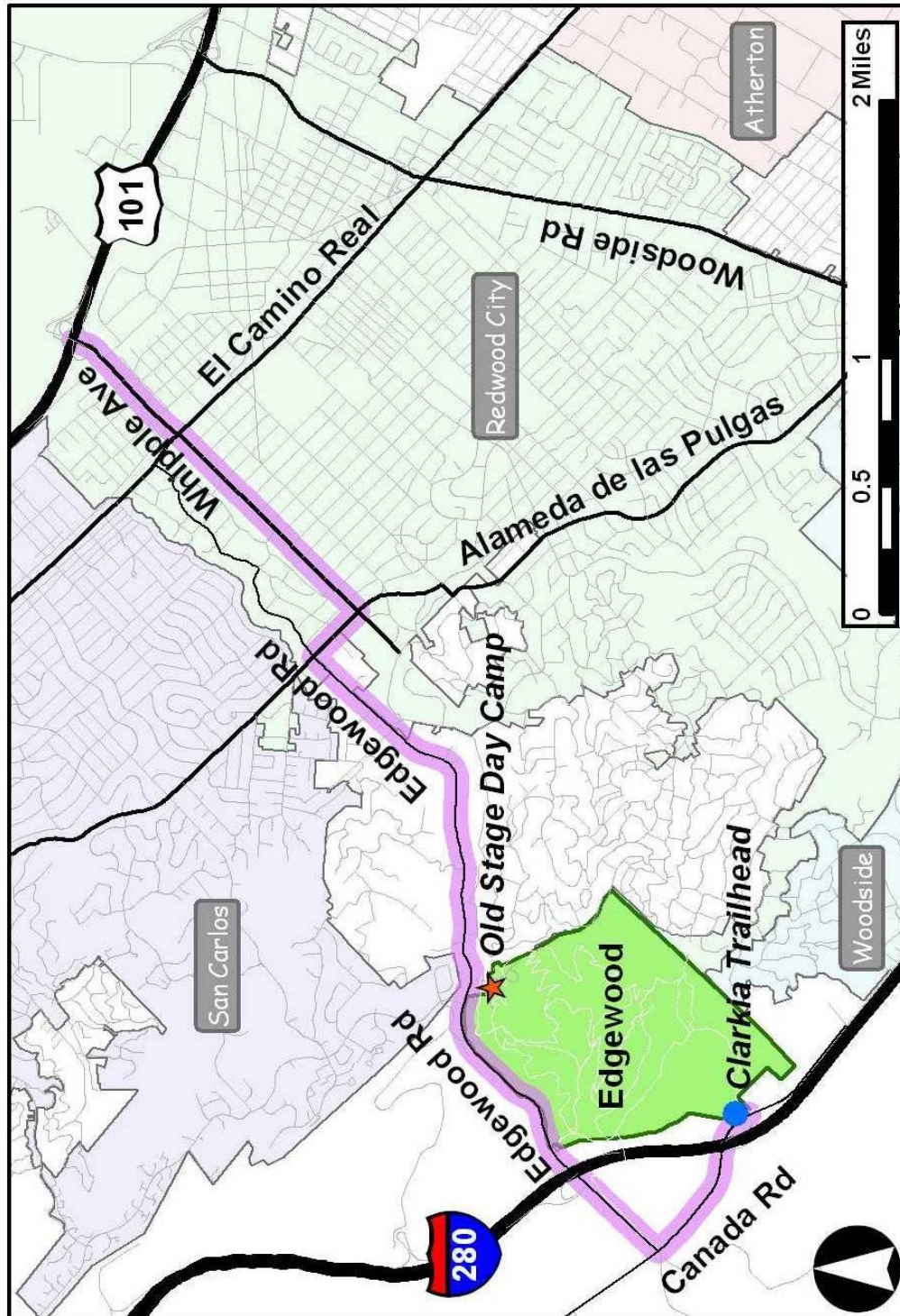


Figure 1 Locator Map



# Trail Map of Edgewood Natural Preserve

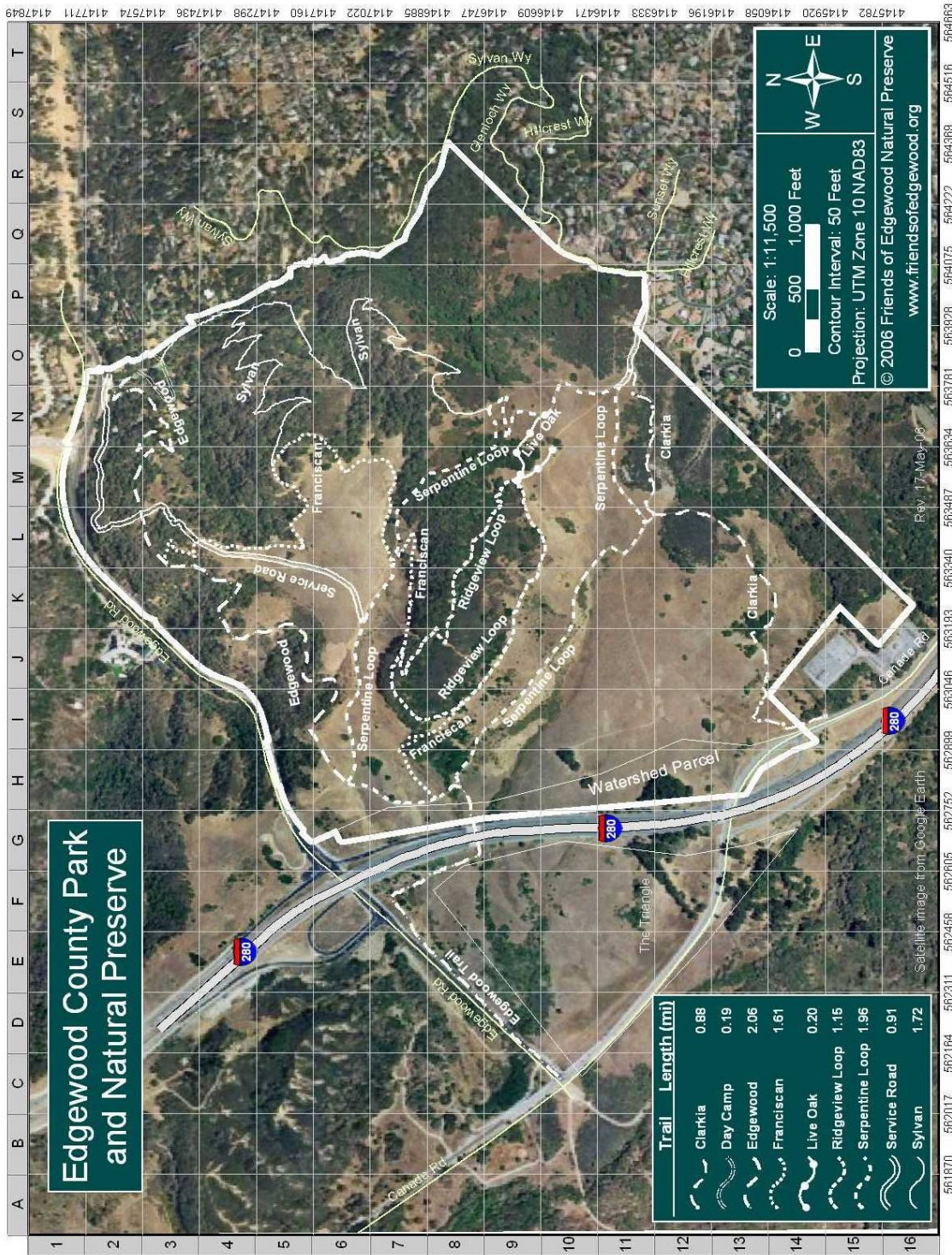


Figure 2 Trails Map

## 3. Strategic Plan Process

### Defining the Need

The Friends of Edgewood first discussed strategic planning in January 2007, after realizing that our organization would benefit from closely examining itself and deciding what it wants to stand for and accomplish over the next several years. We faced a combination of ongoing challenges and developing circumstances that further necessitated the need to plan for our future, including:

- Despite a strong record of successful programs and events (perhaps partly because of them) we have experienced ongoing capacity limitations, especially for leadership and governance roles.
- We needed to come to terms with shifting realities; although Edgewood is officially “preserved,” it nevertheless remains threatened in new ways.
- As more hike requests and program opportunities have been coming our way, we needed to clarify our criteria for engaging in activities, and evaluating their success.
- We wanted to revisit our operating procedures to strengthen and streamline them.
- The promise of Edgewood soon having its own Interpretative Center to help connect the public with the Preserve presents opportunities for us to define our roles and responsibilities in operating the Center.

### Kicking Off the Process

To learn more about the strategic planning process we sent three members to a daylong workshop, consulted with other nonprofit groups, and sought recommendations for appropriate consultants. We hired Regina Neu, a consultant experienced in strategic planning with small to mid-size nonprofits, to facilitate an initial retreat in October 2007. Prior to the retreat, we solicited preliminary input from members during our Annual Meeting and picnic through an informal “Post-it® Poll” for their ideas on the mission, vision, and programs of the Friends. At the retreat, the Executive Committee (ExCom) examined and discussed the Friends’ mission, vision, and values, and developed overarching focus areas, which later guided the formation of work groups.

### Writing the Strategic Plan

Enthused after the retreat, we hired Regina to facilitate the strategic planning process, which began in earnest in January 2008, with six work groups and an oversight committee. Work groups met monthly to create focus-area goal statements; conduct research; discuss the past, present, and future of the organization with a variety of people; identify priorities in each area; and develop work plans for the next three years. At various stages along the way, we have asked key members and other Edgewood



stakeholders for further input, including a draft review, before presentation of the resulting plan to the Friends of Edgewood membership at the Annual Meeting in October 2008.

Throughout this process, we have remained enthusiastic, dedicated, and committed to moving the organization forward. In our smaller work groups as well as gathered together in ExCom meetings, we've posed hard questions and launched discussions on many topics. It has been an eye-opening experience and reminded everyone involved how much this grassroots volunteer organization has accomplished. We are now much better equipped to effectively address the challenges we face, and hope that the strategic plan will provide ongoing guidance as a living document to be reviewed, implemented, and updated annually.

## **Work Group Planning Process**

The following work groups were created that best captured the key strategic areas of the Friends of Edgewood over the next five years:

- Infrastructure
- Interpretive Center
- Partnerships
- Programs
- Preservation / Restoration
- Volunteers

Each work group began by defining the goal desired for that area. Then the group developed a work plan which listed a number of specific objectives which would contribute to that goal. The activities needed to achieve each objective were laid out, including the leadership, timeline and resources needed. These work plans are the working documents to implement the strategic plan and fulfill the strategic priorities.

## **Acknowledgements**

We gratefully acknowledge those who contributed toward the development of this plan. Their names appear in alphabetical order.

- Julia Bott, Executive Director, San Mateo County Parks Foundation
- Carolyn Curtis, Elly Hess, Margaret Marshall, John & Frances Morse, Friendly reviewers
- Dave Holland, San Mateo County Parks Director
- Holly Van Houten, former Executive Director, Committee for Green Foothills
- Dianne Hunt, former Friends of Edgewood Docent Coordinator

- Marshall Lim, coordinator, Edgewood Trail Patrol
- Dave Moore, San Mateo County Parks Superintendent
- Regina Neu, consultant
- Ken Seydel, coordinator, Friends of Edgewood Adopt-A-Highway program
- Kathy Switky, graphic consultant (cover design)
- John Trewin, San Mateo County Parks Ranger III
- Trevlyn Williams, artist (cover art)

## Participants

- Infrastructure Work Group
  - Bill Korbholz (lead)
  - Peter Alley
  - Herb Fischgrund
  - Peter Ingram
- Interpretative Center Work Group
  - Peter Ingram (lead)
  - Julia Bott
  - Kate Finnigan
  - Herb Fischgrund
- Oversight Work Group
  - Carolyn Strange (lead)
  - Susan Crocker
  - Herb Fischgrund
  - Kate Finnigan
- Partnerships Work Group
  - Bill Korbholz (lead)
  - Susan Crocker
  - Carolyn Strange
- Preservation / Restoration Work Group
  - Bill Korbholz (lead)
  - John Allen
  - Peter Alley
  - Paul Heiple
- Programs Work Group
  - Kate Finnigan (lead)
  - Kathy Korbholz
  - Carol Hankermeyer

- Mary Wilson
- Volunteers Work Group
  - Mary Wilson (lead)
  - Herb Fischgrund
  - Carolyn Strange

## 4. Contact Information

The Friends of Edgewood is a California nonprofit public benefit corporation with tax-exempt status under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. We were incorporated in the state of California in November, 1977. We have been assigned Federal EIN (Employer Identification Number) 94-3188191.

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