

## Mangini Ranch Educational Preserve opens near Mount Diablo

‘It’s really special when we can bring our students to this preserve’

By TONY HICKS / BCN FOUNDATION

Save Mount Diablo’s land conservation director Seth Adams was just a few minutes into an interpretive hike of Mangini Ranch Educational Preserve, which the group formally opened last week.

About a half-mile down a gravel road from Concord’s Crystyl Ranch development, and the traffic of Ygnacio Valley Road, Adams stopped near a trickling creek to offer perspective on how nature and civilization rarely co-exist as they do around the mountain.

“Imagine that most animals have to drink every day,” Adams said on March 30. “And how valuable water is in the Diablo Range, where it is scarce. It’s a rugged landscape, which sort of forces evolution. Lots of micro habitats, micro-climates, exposures, geology, things like that.”

“I want you to think about how short a distance we just came, and that we’re in complete solitude now. There’s seven or eight million people within an hour’s drive

of us. But here we are. What do you hear? Insects, birds ... me.”

The conservancy group eagerly showed off its 208 acres on Mt. Diablo’s north side, between Lime Ridge and Mitchell Canyon, which it bought from the Mangini family in 2007.

The former ranch’s wildlife includes western burrowing owls, bobcats, coyotes, American badgers, and the endangered California red-legged frog. The area’s rare plants include the Mount Diablo buckwheat and Hospital Canyon larkspur wildflowers, and the desert olive grove.

During the official ribbon-cutting ceremony before about 35 SMD board members, employees, volunteers, and a few local dignitaries, the group’s executive director Ted Clement said the land was seriously at risk for development. The Mangini family instead sold to the preservation group for \$1.45 million — a far smaller sum than they could’ve got elsewhere.

“It’s a great location for conservation,” Clement said. “We have brought students and



RAY SAINT GERMAIN/BCN

Seth Adams, land conservation director for Save Mount Diablo, leads a group hike at the Mangini Ranch Educational Preserve.

volunteers to do a number of things ... all these great teachers started saying ‘It’s really special when we can bring our students to this preserve and have it to ourselves for the day. We have an intimate experience in nature. It’s safe. It’s controlled.’”

“So we started to work on this concept of creating an educational preserve for the public, where any school, any group — a church group, an addiction recovery group, you name it — could reserve this property, free-of-charge for the day, to come out and have an intimate experience with nature.”

Adams said the area features more than a

half dozen “plant communities.” A shady area is at the top of about a mile-and-a-half single-track loop, where school groups can spend hours learning. Much of that hike is through areas Save Mount Diablo has re-planted and taken other steps to preserve the ecology.

“We’re actively giving nature a hand,” Adams said.

The Mount Diablo buckwheat flower, which was believed extinct from the 1930s until being re-discovered in 2005, has been spotted on the property, as well as other areas on the mountain, which is the only known place it grows. Adams said, put together, there’s less

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# Camp Connection

than an acre of buckwheat left.

Local State Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan, who chairs the State Assembly's Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee, helped cut the ribbon before following Adams up the trail. She said the preserve helps promote equity in education by giving access to all students, free-of-charge.

"We talk about it all day, but you guys are actually doing the work," Bauer-Kahan told the group. "This is the work that needs to be done to ensure that our kids and our communities have the future they deserve."

Clement said he's often asked his opinion of the world's biggest environmental challenge.

"After many years in the field, I've come to the firm conclusion that the biggest environmental threat is the lack of deep, intimate, meaningful relationships between people and nature," he said, adding:

"That's really the problem. If we can align our hearts and minds with the natural world, we'll have the love and will to solve problems like the climate crisis, overpopulation, pollution. So it starts with our relationship with the natural world. That is the most critical thing."

The Mangini Ranch Educational Preserve is available to groups of three to 100 people (no overnight camping) by reservation. For more information, go to <https://bit.ly/3uJP4uN>. ■

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