

Crucial 'missing link' of Bay Trail to open today behind Moffett Field

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A 2.4-mile stretch of new Baylands trail behind Moffett Field will open today, adding a tiny but crucial link to a planned 500-mile continuous trail around San Francisco and San Pablo bays.

Joggers, hikers, bicyclists and others who use the Bay Trail in Mountain View and Sunnyvale currently have to get off once they reach Moffett Field, where gates block a stretch of it. At an 11 a.m. ceremony today, public officials plan to take bolt cutters to one of the gates, symbolically opening the stretch of trail and completing a 26-mile segment between East Palo Alto and San Jose.

The new section closes a "missing link," said Laura Thompson, manager of the Bay Trail project.

"It is a tremendous boost for the

project," Thompson said. "It will welcome many more hikers and bicyclists to the edge of the Bay."

Today, about 300 miles of the 500-mile Bay Trail have been completed, including across the Golden Gate Bridge through natural places such as the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Segments of the trail have been added one by one since 1987, when the state Legislature directed the Association

of Bay Area Governments to begin planning for a continuous trail that would connect all nine Bay Area counties.

Cargill, which owned big chunks of salt flats around the Bay, so far has donated or sold enough land to government agencies to provide about 73 miles of the trail.

In 2003, Cargill parted with 16,500 acres, said Pat

Mapelli, the company's manager of real property and land management.

But dealing with the small 16-acre property behind Moffett Field, where the Sunnyvale gate blocks off the 2.4-mile stretch of trail, was a bit trickier, said Mapelli, adding he has worked to get that section opened since 2004 and finally closed a deal to donate it to NASA on Aug. 31.

The company first had to wait for the Navy, Moffett Field's former operator, to clear up contaminants in a channel that runs along the property, Mapelli said. Then came lengthy negotiations.

When NASA said it couldn't afford to buy the land, Mapelli said, "I went back to our staff at Cargill and recommended we make it a donation, because there was just so much interest in making it happen."

Because the trail is behind Moffett Field, which has many security-sensitive uses, Thompson said trail organizers had to work through some complicated issues. For example, they had to work with the 129th Rescue Wing of the California Air National Guard to make sure there aren't any safety risks being so close to its operations. And while the gates to the trail will be unlocked, NASA is going to keep them up in case they need to be shut for national security reasons, such as a visit from Air Force One, Mapelli said.



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"The public has never been to this part of the Bay shoreline, so there were many things that needed to happen," Thompson said.

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IF YOU GO

WHAT: Grand opening of the Moffett Field section of the Bay Trail. Public officials including U.S. Rep. Anna Eshoo, D-Palo Alto, Mountain View Mayor Ronit Bryant, Sunnyvale Mayor Melinda Hamilton and NASA Ames Director S. Pete Worden are scheduled to attend.

WHEN: Today, from 11 a.m. to noon

WHERE: The ceremony will take place at the east gate, on the Sunnyvale side of Moffett Field.

People arriving by car can catch a shuttle from the parking area at the Sunnyvale Water Pollution Control Plant, 1444 Borregas Ave., Sunnyvale.

Arrive by 10:30 a.m. to allow time for the shuttle ride.

Bicycling to the event is encouraged. Bicyclists traveling on the Bay Trail from the east of Moffett Field can ride directly to the ceremony at the Sunnyvale Gate, but bicyclists riding from the west of Moffett Field will not be able to enter the gate on the Mountain View side until noon, after the ceremony has concluded and both gates have been opened.

MORE INFO: www.baytrail.org



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A gated fence blocks off a 2.4-mile section of the Bay Trail behind Moffett Field in Mountain View on Friday, Sept. 17, 2010. This section of the trail will open to the public at an 11 a.m. ceremony on Monday, Sept. 20, 2010. The trail is envisioned as a 500-mile route encircling the San Francisco and San Pablo bays. (Kirstina Sangsahachart/ Daily News)



ROADSHOW FOCUS

Opening new bike trail around Mountain View

What: Opening a 2.4-mile path near Moffett Field.

And: It will link 26 miles of bike and pedestrian trails from East Palo Alto to San Jose, connecting Baylands Park in Sunnyvale with Shoreline Park in Mountain View.

Source: Association of Bay Area Governments

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