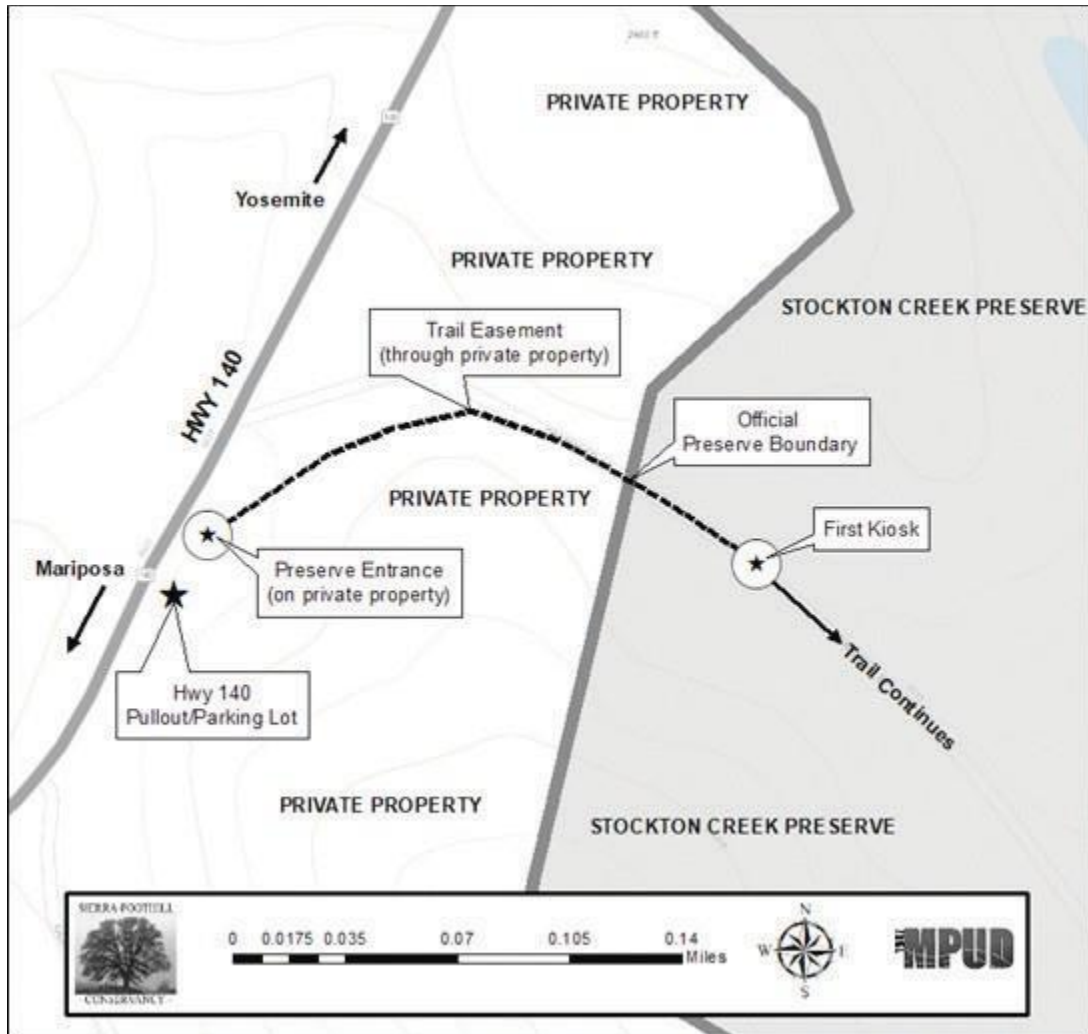


Trash and trespassing could close Stockton Creek Preserve entrance

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A map of the Highway 140 entrance to the Stockton Creek Preserve highlights the stretch of private land guests cross over when they pass from a parking area. Submitted graphic

Sierra Foothill Conservancy leadership is asking guests who enter the Stockton Creek Preserve from the Highway 140 access point to clean up trash they see in the area and remain on the trail when they enter.

Not doing so could potentially result in the loss of that entrance to the local preserve. Visitors who enter Stockton Creek near Highway 140 actually cross over private property before reaching the preserve. Staying on the path across the private property is currently allowed by the landowner.

But recent increasing issues with littering and trespassing off the path have raised concerns for the landowner and groups affiliated with the preserve.

Bridget Fithian, executive director of the Sierra Foothill Conservancy, said the strip of private land is small – but it's also important. It serves as a bridge between the publicly accessible parking area and the preserve.

"We've been really appreciative of the access that the landowner has provided to the public that goes from the Highway 140 entrance of the preserve into what's actually owned by Mariposa Public Utility District," Fithian said. "And I think probably, most people don't know that they're walking through private property before they actually get on to the preserve."

She explained how the preserve has experienced a "huge increase" in usage in the past year. This is a good thing, Fithian said, but in order to ensure guests can continue to use the private land entrance, visitors are being asked to help keep the area clean and to avoid trespassing.

Not littering and picking up trash are the first things Fithian asked readers to do when visiting the site. She also requested preserve guests stay on the trail and avoid straying off to the northeast before passing the first kiosk.

"They'll know what it is because that area has had a major vegetation treatment project take place on it," Fithian explained. "And so you can see the difference between what is Stockton Creek Preserve land and what is that private landowner's land because of the treatment he's been doing on his property."

Fithian stressed the landowner "really wants to work with us to help remedy the situation." He has kindly reached out to MPUD and wants to help, she said. He wants people to continue to have access via the highway, Fithian added, but both he and MPUD share concerns about trash and trespassing.

“And so this is like a really important call to action for our community,” Fithian said. “To stay on the path going in and then also keep the preserve clean.”

If the entrance were to close in the future, access would be limited to the entrance near the upper sports field used by Mariposa County High School students. The Highway 140 entrance is located just east of Mariposa on Highway 140 and is currently the predominant access point to the preserve.

According to the SFC website, the Stockton Creek Preserve is a unique partnership project between SFC and Mariposa Public Utility District. The 410-acre preserve and trail system provides domestic water supply protection, watershed conservation, recreation opportunities and fire hazard reduction.

SFC worked in partnership with MPUD to develop the project and completed the preserve in December 2011. MPUD now owns and manages the property for its public benefits.