

# Connecting with Nature on Fiscalini Ranch Preserve: Planning for Better Public Access



By KITTY CONNOLLY, Executive Director, Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve ([fiscaliniranchpreserve.org](http://fiscaliniranchpreserve.org))

On a foggy morning in early July, I met Kevin Howen out on Fiscalini Ranch Preserve. Kevin is the GIS Team Lead for SWCA Environmental Consultants in San Luis Obispo. Kevin was there to map part of the Ranch using a drone. Later in the month, Travis Belt, Senior Biologist for SWCA, spent a morning mapping the wetland plants in the area. They were helping Friends of the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve (FFRP) with a new project.

For a long time now there's been talk of linking the Bluff and Marine Terrace trails with an ADA accessible boardwalk. At the north end, these heavily used trails come together at Windsor Boulevard, but at the south end, they do not connect. People wanting to take both routes must either use the unpaved path between them or walk out onto Wedgewood Street to get from one trail to another. As we learned during the January storm, the connecting path can be quite muddy and slippery. Even at the best of times, the slope and terrain make it unpassable for the mobility impaired.

The board of FFRP is in the planning stages for establishing safe passage between the Bluff Trail and the Marine Terrace Trail, also known as the fire road. The goal of this linking boardwalk is to improve safety and access with a multi-use trail for walkers and people using wheelchairs, strollers, and electric mobility-assistance vehicles.

Creating a detailed elevation map showing the environmentally sensitive habitat areas is the first step in that planning. The constraints revealed by this analysis will guide the route of the new boardwalk.

Another aspect of this project is enhancing wildlife viewing opportunities so there may be signs along the linking boardwalk showing common birds and other animals. This is a great location for seeing raptors and the small mammals they hunt. During the next few months FFRP will be inviting public input into the design of the boardwalk and signage through meetings and surveys. Cambria Community Healthcare District will partner with FFRP in gathering input.



View of the project area taken from a drone looking south.

Thanks to Bill Henry, Director of the SLO office, SWCA is currently donating their services as part of their "SWCA Gives Back" program. Going forward, FFRP will need to hire an engineering firm and environmental consultants to complete all the reviews and approvals. Two very generous Cambria couples have donated funds to cover those initial expenses.

In November, we plan to apply for a grant from the California State Parks Regional Parks Grant Program to pay for project construction and rehabilitation of the abandoned path. This is one of the ways FFRP seeks to support the Cambria Community Services District and fulfill our mission of public access.