UC SANTA BARBARA
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Bringing Back Mother Nature

Approximately 40 people gathered in the community center of the Sierra Madre Apartments on Feb. 23 to hear an update on the UC Santa Barbara North Campus Open Space (NCOS) restoration project. Members of the NCOS Project committee and of the NCOS Science Advisory Board, which developed the project program, were on hand to take comments from area residents and to answer their questions.

The meeting was designed to elicit broad input, foster discussion of the evolving plan and engage the public in the process.

UC Santa Barbara is undertaking the restoration project in collaboration with the Trust for Public Land (TPL) and numerous public agencies. In 2013, TPL purchased 63 acres of Ocean Meadows Golf Course and subsequently gifted the property to UCSB to serve as long-term stewards of the land. The goal of the project is to revive and preserve wetlands on the upper Devereux Slough, which some 50 years ago was filled with soil to create Ocean Meadows Golf Course. Integration of adjacent uplands will bring the NCOS total area to 136 acres and create an expanse of coastal habitat that extends some three miles along the Ellwood Devereux coast.

According to project manager Ed Schmittgen, an associate director of design and construction services, California Environmental Quality Act documents on the project are expected to be released by spring, after which the campus will seek all the required approvals and permits to initiate work at the site.

The first phase of the two-year-long project is expected to begin in August and continue through November. It would consist of the initial grading, which is necessary to create the walking trails. After suspending operations for the rainy season, work would commence on excavation, bridge building and planting.

According to Marc Fisher, UCSB vice chancellor for administrative services, the restoration is meant to bring the area as close as possible to its original state, which includes low-lying wetlands and native coastal and salt marsh plants, as well as to provide an adequate corridor for wildlife to move back and forth.

Among the concerns voiced by residents were issues related to the grading process: the disruption caused by bulldozers and other earth-moving vehicles, excessive dust and limited — though temporary — coastal access. However, Fisher noted that each phase of the project will be fine-tuned for efficiency and safety, while maintaining as much access as possible to the open space and to coastal trail routes.

“I appreciate the design,” said homeowner John Olson. “Usually I’m negative toward a lot of things that are going on, but I just want to express a positive view.”

The North Campus Open Space Restoration Project Draft Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration is now available for public review and comment. The review period continues through Monday, March 28, 2016, and comments can be directed via email to shari.hammond@planning.ucsb.edu. Written comments, postmarked no later than 5 p.m. Monday, March 28, should be sent to the Office of Campus Planning and Design, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA 93106.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.