

# MOUNT DIABLO REVIEW

MOUNT DIABLO INTERPRETIVE ASSOCIATION

SPRING / SUMMER 2022 • MDIA, PO Box 346, Walnut Creek, CA 94597-0346 • 925-927-7222 • www.mdia.org

## California Condor Visits Diablo

Last October, for the first time in a century, a California condor visited the slopes of Mount Diablo. No human eye spotted her flight so far as we know, but her GPS monitor kept track of her. Her official ID is Pinnacles Condor 828, the only name she will ever have in the peopled world. Over the space of three days, lollygagging along, she soared a hundred miles north from Pinnacles National Park, her home area near the Central Coast. She's just short of breeding age. Stirred by the natural wanderlust of her species, she may have stashed away some keen visual images of potential nest sites on that flight. We can't know, but we can hope.

Are we likely to see condors over Mount Diablo State Park? No, not yet. But that's a lot different than saying "No, not ever," thanks to all the remarkable people, many of them volunteers, who for decades have prevented the species from blinking out of existence. As 828's sighting proves, Mount Diablo and the Diablo Range are just a long glide away from Pinnacles. Preserved and sparsely developed lands in between offer what's called a wildlife corridor, critical to keeping all wildlife in circulation between prime sources of food, cover, and eligible mates.

Let's take a look at this colossal bird, the "gothic lord" of the wilderness, as Diablo Range wildlife biologist Joseph Belli has written.

With a nine-foot wingspan, condors reign as the largest land birds in North America. The Andean condor's wingspan is only slightly bigger, though it's a heftier bird. To put size in perspective, think of a turkey vulture, a large condor-like bird you can't fail to see in our skies. It weighs three pounds. A California condor weighs up to 25. A major reason the population fell disastrously low in the last century was the bird's very immensity. Imagine a flock of condors gathered around a dead whale at the beach 150 years ago as they put

away four pounds of meat each. Even before a meal, they are lumbering and slow to launch. Beached and glutted in the 1800's, they made for great target practice.

To say "150 years ago" is not to grab a random number out of a hat. In the first year after the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill in 1849, 100,000 so-called settlers came to California. Instead, they unsettled this place profoundly. They quickly swamped the small but stable populations of Native Americans, and altered the landscape at its foundation, in part by taking aim at wildlife with little discrimination. Until the 1940's when the first true biological field study proved that condors eat only carrion, people viewed them as predators. On cattle ranches, condors gathered every autumn in a bobbing black mob around dead calves. The birds got their due: poison and lead bullets.

Poisoning and lead bullets remain as primary threats to the birds today, but with a different twist. Despite widespread, vigorous, and costly recovery efforts since the 1970's lead

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 3)



PHOTO: WADE TREGASKIS, CREATIVE COMMONS, BY-NC 2.0

## ENJOY MOUNT DIABLO! by Cameron Morrison, MDSP Supervising Ranger



**OVER THE PAST TWO YEARS,** as the global pandemic has impacted our normal everyday lives in many new and unexpected ways, one thing has remained a constant- the importance that outdoor recreation has on our emotional and mental well-being. Immediately following national, state and county restrictions, the visitation at Mount Diablo

State Park increased dramatically. At the outset of the pandemic, we saw many first time users begin to explore the park. Over the past two years, we have begun to notice that many of those first time visitors have now become regular users of the park.

Whether this is your first time at Mount Diablo State Park, or whether you consider yourself to be a regular user of the park, there are some things to keep in mind while spending time here. Mount Diablo State Park can provide you with great memories, amazing photos, new experiences, and more than one hundred miles of physically challenging trails to explore. However, for those unprepared, Mount Diablo can be a dangerous place.

In order to enjoy the park safely, I ask that you follow all park rules. Many of the rules can be found on the last page of this newsletter. If you are driving on the paved roads throughout the park, follow all rules of the road and only pass bicyclists when safe and legal to do so. If you are spending the night or having a barbecue with friends or family, please follow all fire restrictions. If hiking or riding your bicycle in the backcountry, be sure to have plenty of water, leave your dog at home and hike or ride within your abilities.

I hope that you enjoy your visit to Mount Diablo State Park and you are able to make new memories, reconnect with nature, share an incredible photo with a friend or family member or return home with sore muscles and a new appreciation for all that Mount Diablo State Park has to offer. 🌿

## MDIA PRESIDENT'S COLUMN by Stephen Smith



**THIS HAS BEEN ONE OF THE** most challenging years of my life, as it has for so many of you. This year brought about significant changes in which I lost my dear mother, sold my home of 21 years, and moved back to my hometown of Danville. I love being back home, closer to this beautiful mountain and to the commu-

nity I am fond of. As my emotions ebb and flow so too does the cycle of the seasons. The darkest days of my life fell upon me like the bleak cold of winter with light struggling to penetrate. And then slowly the sun broke through and a process of rebirth, renewal and light found its way like a beautiful spring day.

Mount Diablo is regenerative and has sustained our spiritual well-being for thousands of years of human history. As spring slowly emerges the mountain transforms into a colorful paradise; with the healthy amount of rainfall in the Bay Area this December you are in for a real treat. Wildflowers are my passion and with 350 varieties found within our 20,000 acres, there is always something new to behold. But it is in these rainy years following prolonged drought that really put on a show, not the super blooms seen in the high desert, but a magnificent profusion of color and variety just the same. No matter how you use the mountain, whether on foot, wheel, or hoof, you can find beautiful displays of color.

With summer heat comes another change to our mountain as green turns to gold. We see the emergence of the heartier flowers and plants, releasing their wild and pleasant aromas as the heat of the day sets in. This is a time to respect mother nature and seek respite in cool and shady canyons. You can give a big hug to the 'refrigerator tree,' our lovely Madrones whose smooth bark is always cool to the touch.

Change can be daunting and terrifying, yet it can also be transformative and life-affirming. As we emerge from our winter slumber let us reconnect with nature, revisit our mountain, and reinvent ourselves. 🌿

## California Condor Visits Diablo

poisoning from bullets still plagues the birds. Condor specialists across the American West address lead poisoning with what most of us would deem desperate determination. By the time condors at Pinnacles National Park reach breeding age, almost all have received emergency treatment to reduce lead in their bloodstreams to non-lethal levels. Some require repeated treatments, and some can't be saved. Lead troubles other scavengers in the same way, including turkey vultures, hawks, eagles, ravens, and bears, especially grizzlies, the uber-scavenger.

Add to this danger the wildfires such as the 2020 blazes ignited by lightning strikes in August of 2020, which joined forces to blacken nearly 400,000 acres in five counties, including Contra Costa, the home of Mount Diablo State Park. In Monterey County, the Dolan Fire torched a major condor sanctuary, killing 11 condors, including two chicks.

Losing chicks is a gut-wrencher: adults breed only every other year, and females lay just one egg. In captivity, scientists increase this rate by absconding with that one egg to place it in an incubator. The momentarily befuddled parents will then lay another, a behavior called double-clutching. Another offset to this unpromising production of eggs is that condors can live 60 years. That helps a lot. However, a recovery effort deemed successful requires that the birds survive on their own in the wild, and that remains a long way off.

Here's why. The Oregon Zoo in Portland contributes captive-bred birds to the condor restoration programs in California and Arizona but refuses to propagate the hope that condors will return to the Columbia River Basin, where the Lewis and Clark explorers contemplated their own starvation while watching birds feast on whales, seals, otters, and sea lions. To reinstate condors in Oregon would take the restoration of vast ecosystems reaching north and south connected by rich corridors of wild land with healthy salmon runs and vigorous mammal populations, including wolves—plus some regular rain.

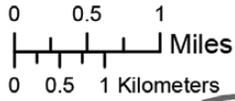


A COMPOSITE VIEW SHOWS A TURKEY VULTURE SOARING WITH A CONDOR. PHOTO COURTESY OF GAVIN EMMONS, NPS

But Mount Diablo is well within reach of Central Coast condors, so we are watching for them here in the eastern East Bay. It may be years before another comes to the mountain, but that gives us all a chance to train our eyes. You may ask: Why do you need me if the condors are tracked by GPS? Because we might not hear immediately about a condor wandering our way. Visual sightings are precious. And wouldn't you like to be the one who spots a condor sailing over North Peak? 🌿

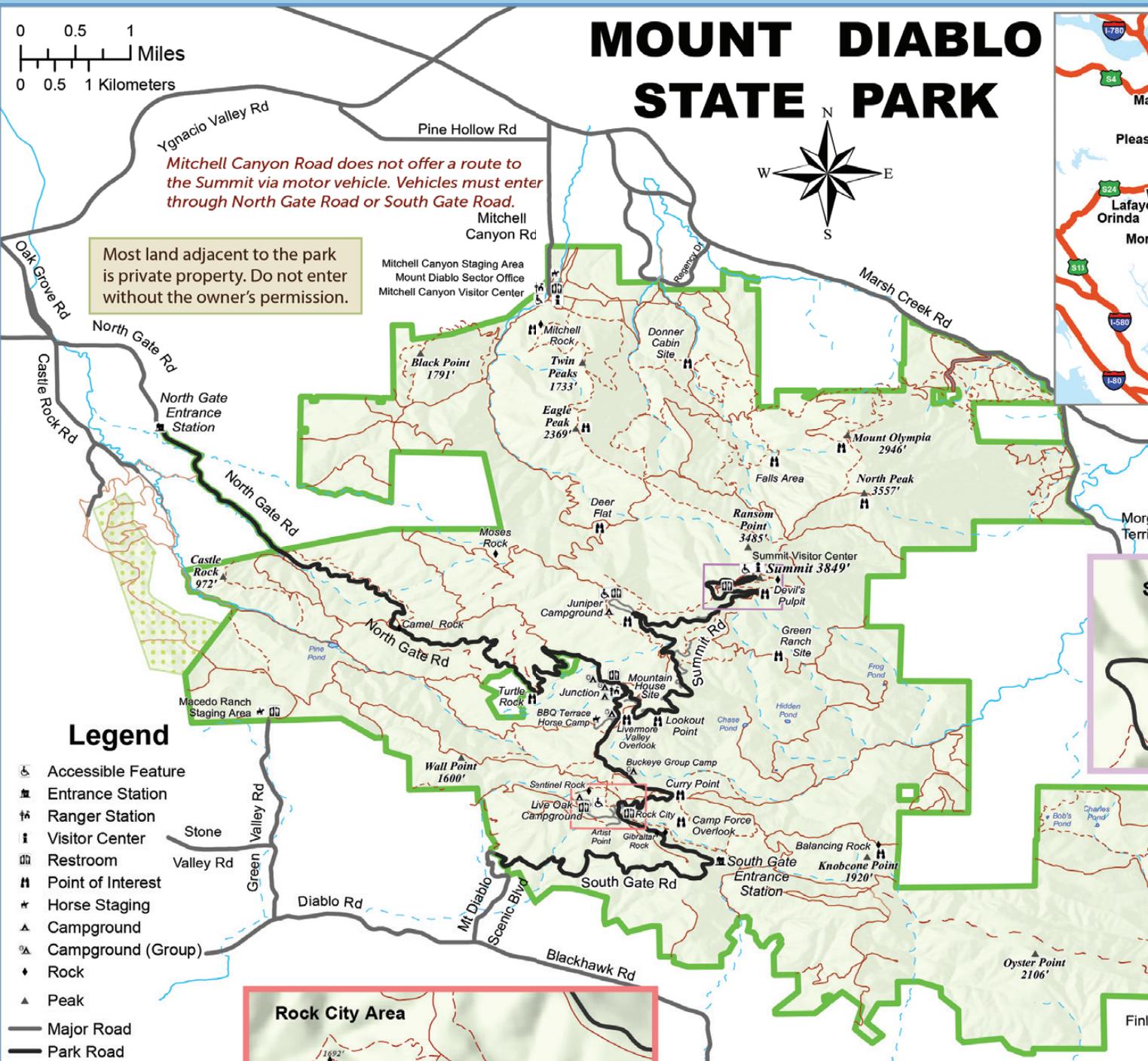
—By Staci Hobbet

# MOUNT DIABLO STATE PARK



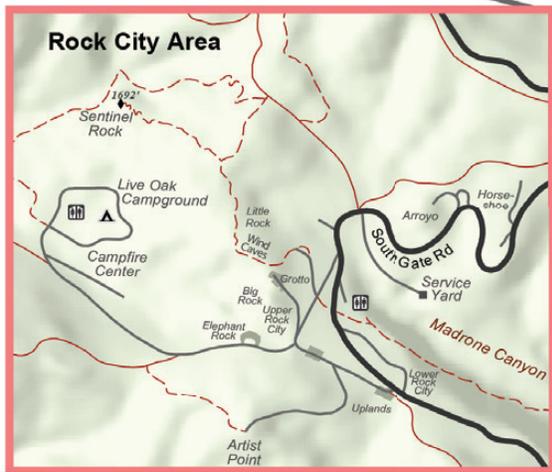
Most land adjacent to the park is private property. Do not enter without the owner's permission.

Mitchell Canyon Road does not offer a route to the Summit via motor vehicle. Vehicles must enter through North Gate Road or South Gate Road.



## Legend

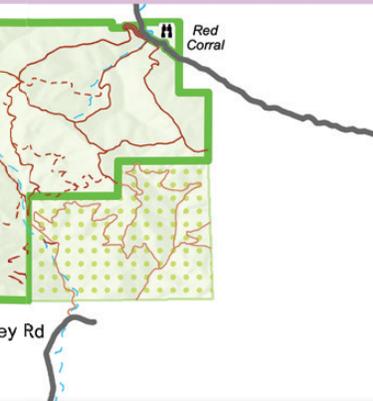
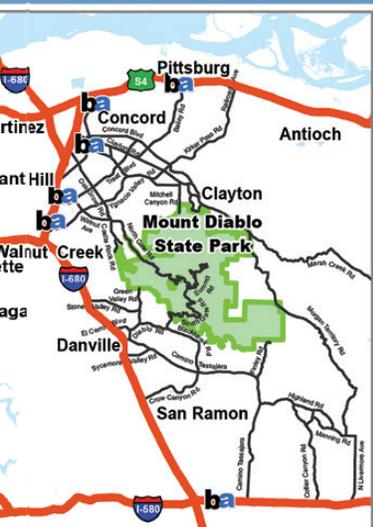
- Accessible Feature
- Entrance Station
- Ranger Station
- Visitor Center
- Restroom
- Point of Interest
- Horse Staging
- Campground
- Campground (Group)
- Rock
- Peak
- Major Road
- Park Road
- Fire Road
- non-MDSP
- Single-track Trail
- Trail Bikes OK
- Paved Trail
- Perennial Creek
- Seasonal Creek
- Pond
- Administered By EBRPD
- Mount Diablo State Park



| Park Fees per Car               |          |
|---------------------------------|----------|
| Mitchell Canyon Entrance*       | \$6.00   |
| Macedo Ranch Entrance*          | \$6.00   |
| North and South Gate Entrances* | \$10.00  |
| Golden Poppy Annual Pass        | \$125.00 |
| California Explorer Annual Pass | \$195.00 |
| * MINUS \$1 FOR SENIORS 62+     |          |

| SITE             |
|------------------|
| Stagecoach       |
| Boundary         |
| Buckeye          |
| Wildcat          |
| Barbecue Terrace |

# Camping at Mount Diablo State Park



## Mount Diablo has three designated family camping areas and five group camps:

**JUNIPER CAMPGROUND** (36 sites, elevation 3,000 ft.) Located approximately two miles below the summit, on Summit Road, Juniper is known for its fantastic views. Three campsites meet accessibility (Americans with Disabilities Act) standards. **Reservations available.**

**LIVE OAK CAMPGROUND** (23 sites, elevation 1,450 ft.) Located one mile above the South Gate Entrance Station, off South Gate Road. Live Oak is near Rock City, where one can explore rock formations. **Reservations available.**

**JUNCTION CAMPGROUND** (6 sites, elevation 2,200 ft.) Located where South Gate and North Gate meet at the Ranger Station. This campground is situated in an open woodland area. **Available on a first-come, first-served basis only.**

**GROUP CAMPS** are Buckeye, Barbecue Terrace, Wildcat, Stagecoach, and Boundary. Each campground is primitive with running water (subject to availability) and pit toilets. Barbecue Terrace is equipped with horse ties for equestrian use. RVs are not allowed in the group camping areas. **Please check the state park website for status.**

- All campgrounds are provided with picnic tables, fire pits or stoves, potable water (subject to availability) and restrooms. Showers are available at Juniper and Live Oak campgrounds at no additional charge.
- The campgrounds are mainly designed for tent camping, but can accommodate RVs up to 20 ft. in length. No hookups and dumping stations are provided.

## Camping Procedures

Make reservations up to six months in advance using the ReserveCalifornia website at [reservcalifornia.com](http://reservcalifornia.com). To view a map of the campgrounds and for additional info, please visit [mdia.org/camping](http://mdia.org/camping).

Check-in time is 2:00 p.m. Check-out time is 12:00 noon.

During the fire season (generally May to October) the park is subject to closure due to extreme fire danger. Campers must call the park at 925-837-2525 or 925-837-0904 one day prior to their arrival to confirm park status.

## General Rules

- Alcoholic beverages are prohibited in the park.
- Eight people and two vehicles maximum per campsite.
- Each juvenile (under age of 18) must have written permission from his/her parents (with parent's phone number) prior to camping without adult supervision. Phone verifications will be attempted.
- Quiet hours are from 10:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.
- No electric generators from 8:00 p.m. to 10:00 a.m.
- Firewood gathering is prohibited.
- Fires must be in stoves or fire pits provided. **NO GROUND FIRES.**
- Campfire restrictions are in effect during the fire season. Check fire conditions for appropriate use (see page 6).
- Campers are locked in the park overnight from sunset to 8:00 a.m. For emergencies dial 911.
- Quiet—noise must not carry beyond your immediate campground or picnic area.

| Group Camps |                 |          |          |
|-------------|-----------------|----------|----------|
|             | NIGHTLY USE FEE | CAPACITY |          |
|             |                 | CAMPERS  | VEHICLES |
| each        | \$65            | 20       | 7        |
| y           | \$65            | 20       | 7        |
|             | \$100           | 30       | 10       |
|             | \$100           | 30       | 10       |
| e           | \$165           | 50       | 17       |

## WHAT CAN I SEE FROM MY CAR?

See also: <https://www.mdia.org/points-of-interest>

**Summit Visitor Center** Enjoy the view from 3,849 feet, and the natural history displays in the center. Hike the Mary Bowerman Trail just below the summit. This flat 0.7 mile trail travels around the mountain, providing spectacular views when clear. The first 0.3 mile is wheelchair accessible, and there is a designated ADA parking space at the start of the trail.

**Rock City** See “Wind Caves,” Native American mortars, and find Elephant Rock. Great site for children and a family picnic. Walk to Sentinel Rock, Artist’s Point, or Live Oak Campground. Check out Fossil Ridge Trail, about 1.2 miles out and back.

**Diablo Valley Overlook** At 2,900 feet, this large parking area near Juniper Campground has spectacular views of the East Bay. Hike to the Summit: 3 miles round trip and 1,000-foot elevation gain. Start at Laurel Nook Picnic Area and take the Summit Trail.

**Picnic Areas** There are many picnic sites and tables along the road. Discover one today.

**Other Hikes** Mt Diablo has over 160 miles of trails and a hike for everyone. See <https://www.mdia.org/hiking-mount-diablo> to learn more

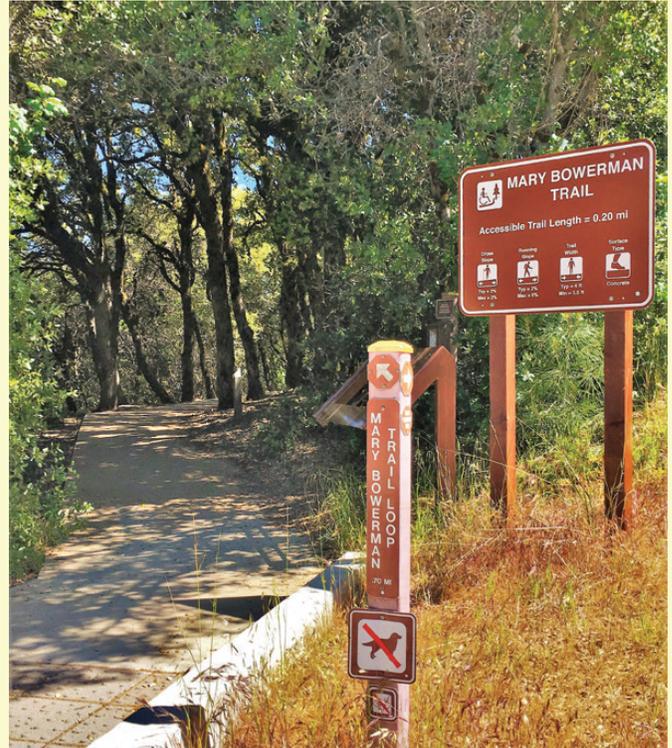


PHOTO: MARY BOWERMAN TRAIL

| FIRE DANGER CHART   |  |                        |                 |                             |                                |                          |
|---------------------|--|------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Fire Danger Reading | Wood fire permitted in stoves and BBQ pits (designated picnic and campsites) | Use of Compressed Logs | Use of Charcoal | Use of Self-contained Stove | Cigarette Smoking <sup>1</sup> | Park Closed <sup>2</sup> |
| LOW                 | YES  | YES                    | YES             | YES                         | YES                            | NO                       |
| MEDIUM              | NO   | YES                    | YES             | YES                         | YES                            | NO                       |
| HIGH                | NO   | NO                     | YES             | YES                         | NO                             | NO                       |
| HIGH WITH RED FLAG  | NO   | NO                     | NO              | YES                         | NO                             | NO                       |
| VERY HIGH/EXTREME   | NO   | NO                     | NO              | NO                          | NO                             | YES                      |

<sup>1</sup>the prohibition of smoking under high fire danger includes smoking within a vehicle.  
<sup>2</sup>park closure applies to all hikers, vehicles, bicyclists (mountain and road), and horseback riders.

### Fire Danger: How Will It Affect You?

- When permitted, fires must be in stoves or provided fire pits.
- Never leave a fire unattended.
- Extinguish all fires prior to departure.
- Ground fires are not permitted.
- Firewood gathering is prohibited.
- Report all wildfires immediately. Call 911.

### Astronomy on Mount Diablo

The Astronomy Program is presented by Mount Diablo State Park, Mount Diablo Astronomical Society (MDAS), and Mount Diablo Observatory Association. For more details, go to Mount Diablo Astronomical Society’s website, [www.mdas.net](http://www.mdas.net), and click on Event Calendar.

### New Mitchell Canyon Visitor Center

MDIA contracted with Ware Architects in March 2021 to prepare a site master plan for Mitchell Canyon including a new visitor center. After a six month planning process that solicited the ideas of over 100 stakeholders, the architects presented their plans to the MDIA Board at their September 2021 meeting at which time the Board gave an enthusiastic approval. Since then, MDIA has applied for a State grant for funding and is also gearing up for a fundraising campaign, likely to be launched in the Spring, 2022. For more information, go to the MDIA.org website to see how you can help.

## Explore Mount Diablo Online

MDIA.org, the website of the Mount Diablo Interpretive Association, is your go-to resource for all things related to Mount Diablo State Park. Whether you're looking for great hikes, points of interest, or a list of seasonal wildflowers, you will find a variety of interactive online tools to help you better plan your visit and enjoy the park before, during, and after your stay. In addition to practical up-to-date information about emergency closures, camping, and visitor center hours, our newly expanded website also includes online guides to Mount Diablo's unique flora, fauna, and geology. For those looking for park souvenirs, clothing, or printed books and field guides, our online shop is quick and easy to use. And if you're interested in volunteering in the park or becoming a member of MDIA, we've got a tab for that too.

Visit MDIA.org today to learn more!

- Videos and podcasts about the park, <https://www.mdia.org/events/archiveall>
- Directions, admission fees, and park information
- Campground, picnic, and visitor center information
- Guide to popular hikes (by level of difficulty)
- Schedule of events and activities
- Guide to butterflies of Mount Diablo
- Guide to wildflowers of Mount Diablo
- Guide to birds of Mount Diablo
- Natural history webinars
- Convenient search feature
- Online store and membership information
- Learn about volunteer opportunities



For more information about volunteering, email [volunteer@mdia.org](mailto:volunteer@mdia.org) or leave a phone message at 925-927-7222.

### Become an MDIA member today!



Use your smart phone to join now or shop online.

<https://mount-diablo-interpretive-association.square.site/>

| SIX LEVELS OF MEMBERSHIP: |       | PRODUCTS:                   |
|---------------------------|-------|-----------------------------|
| Senior (55+)              | \$15  | • Maps                      |
| Student                   | \$15  | • Nature Guides             |
| Individual                | \$25  | • Hiking and History Guides |
| Family                    | \$40  | • Clothing                  |
| Contributing              | \$100 | • Bicycle Jerseys           |
| Lifetime                  | \$500 |                             |



# Park Rules

You are responsible for obeying these and other Park rules

- **All Features of the Park Are Protected!** Do not remove or disturb plants, animals, or geological features.
- **Park Hours:** Opens at 8 a.m. and closes at sunset. Visitors should be in their vehicles heading out at sunset to avoid being locked in.
- **No Alcohol:** All alcoholic beverages are prohibited in the park.
- **Vehicles/Bicycles Speed Limit:** 15 to 25 mph on park roads, 15 mph in campgrounds and picnic areas. All vehicles must stay on the pavement and are prohibited on trails and fire roads.
- **Bicycles** are allowed only on paved roads, fire roads, and designated trails. Check at the Ranger Station for current regulations.
- **Drones or Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS)** are prohibited.
- **Skateboards**, rollerblades, rollerskates, and gravity-propelled devices are prohibited.
- **Dogs:** Must be on leash at all times when out of your car; must be in tent or a vehicle at night; and must stay in developed areas—they are not allowed on trails or fire roads.
- **Fires:** Restrictions in effect during season. Check with a Ranger. Fires must be in fire pits or barbecues provided—no ground fires.
- **Emergencies:** Dial 911.
- **Fireworks** are prohibited.
- **Firearms**/airguns and hunting are prohibited.

## Mount Diablo State Park Phone Numbers

|                          |              |
|--------------------------|--------------|
| General information..... | 925-837-2525 |
| Summit Museum .....      | 925-837-6119 |
| Junction Ranger .....    | 925-837-6129 |
| TTY Relay Service.....   | 711          |

MAILING ADDRESS:  
(NOT FOR VEHICLE ACCESS)

**Mount Diablo State Park**  
96 Mitchell Canyon Road  
Clayton, CA 94517-1500



California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the Contra Solano Sector Office, 925-673-2891. This newsletter is available in alternate formats by contacting 925-673-2891.

## Rules of the Road for Motorists and Cyclists



Share the roadway with all Park users.

- Drive at or below the posted Park speed limits. CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE 22350\*
- Pass with sufficient visual clearance CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE 21751 \*
- Do not pass on blind curves. CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE 21752(A)\*
- Give bicyclists 3 feet clearance. CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE 21760(b)\*
- Yield to equestrians. CALIFORNIA VEHICLE CODE 21759\*

\*MINIMUM FINE: \$238

## Understanding Trail Signs



**TRAIL SIGNS IN THE PARK FOLLOW** California State Parks' uniform format. The name of the trail you are on is specified in relatively small horizontal type near the top of the sign. The name that appears vertically in large type (another trail but sometimes a destination or park boundary) identifies the termination of that particular trail; note the word "TO" in small letters. The mileage to that end point is specified at the bottom.