Trail connecting Cabrillo to Nisene Marks gets final approval

By JESSICA M. PASKO FOR THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

APTOS — Hikers will soon be able to walk from Nisene Marks State Park to Cabrillo College via one connected trail.

The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors this week approved an agreement with a private property owner and with the California Conservation Corps for the construction of the approximately half-mile trail.

Through an easement with the owners of a 142-acre property in the Vienna Woods Neighborhood, a 16-foot wide trail will traverse the width of the property to connect Cabrillo College with Nisene Marks State Park.

It was previously known as the Koch Trail, according to the Advocates for the Forest of Nisene Marks, a nonprofit volunteer organization that supports the maintenance and improvement of the park.

"Any time you can connect two recreational elements, it provides for a different and better experience for more people," said Gretchen Iliff, the park maintenance manager for the Santa Cruz County Department of Parks, Open Space and Culture Services.

Iliff, who has been working on the project since 2009, said it will provide for greater access, which is "always good."

The process has been in motion for a long while but Tuesday's vote by the Board of Supervisors marked the final step in the lengthy approval process. In February 2012, the Board of Supervisors approved development requests from the property's owner, Carmichael Enterprises, with the condition of a grant of easement establishing the trail. The grant of easement required certain conditions be met, including environmental approval, approval from the California State Parks Department and Cabrillo College, and timely notification of the landowner that all conditions have been met.

Now that those conditions are met, the supervisors have granted approval, construction of the trail can begin. The Parks Department has obtained a sponsor agreement with the California Conservation Corps for $17,540 to achieve this. The portion of private property is currently overgrown with dense underbrush, including poison oak.

The finished trail will be six-feet wide and will include a small bridge. The money will also help pay for trail markers and other signs.

Construction will begin this summer and will hopefully be completed in the fall, said Iliff.

"The parks department will also be responsible for maintaining and managing the trail for community use. The trail has a historic use, having one served as a logging trail. It's also been used illegally for a number of years, with hikers and others trespassing on the private property."

County Supervisor Zach Friend picked up the project from his predecessor, former Supervisor Ellen Pirie.

"Ellen and her staff did a significant amount of heavy lifting," Friend said of their efforts.

"They pushed for the trail came from the community."

"This finalizes and solidifies something the community has wanted for awhile," he said.

Friend said he and his staff have been working with the community and the Vienna Woods Neighborhood in particular on parking and safety concerns. Parking restrictions will be implemented in the area and overnight parking is unlikely to be allowed.

Ultimately, the hope is to eventually expand the trail to connect to a series of other on- and off-road trails to create an entire network of paths to New Brighton State Beach. Though the project has been referred to as "The Carmichael Trail Project" after the property owners, it will likely be officially named the Nisene to Sea Trail at some point.