Rancho Seco Howard Ranch Trail

The trail is 7-miles, roundtrip, which starts at the Rancho Seco Recreational Area and winds around the north end of Rancho Seco Lake.

The trail provides visitors with the opportunity to experience the awe-inspiring landscape of southeastern Sacramento County. This landscape includes vernal pools, seasonal wetlands that are ecological havens, as well as riparian and marsh habitat, colorful flora and dramatic views of oak woodland habitat and the Sierra Nevada Mountains in the distance.

The landscape changes dramatically throughout the year. Each season has unique beauty. Winter and early spring feature the vernal pools where fairy shrimp and a variety of other aquatic animals use the pools to complete their short lifecycles. Vernal pools are crucial to the life cycle of federally listed threatened and endangered species, such as the California Tiger Salamander, vernal pool fairy shrimp, and vernal pool tadpole shrimp. Following the rainy season, when the water evaporates, vivid floral displays spring up to carpet the ground. In the summer heat, the carpet turns to a golden brown.

The Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD) worked together with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the California Conservation Corps (CCC) to make this trail a reality. TNC funded construction and Corps members from the CCC Tahoe Center constructed the trail, which included bridges, gates, and the turnpike (gravel) section. SMUD will maintain the trail. The trailhead is on SMUD property, which provides road access and public parking.

The trail traverses a portion of the historic Howard Ranch, a ranch that was purchased in the 1930s by Charles Howard, owner of the racehorse Seabiscuit, made famous by the book and movie. In 1999, TNC purchased 12,000 acres of the Howard Ranch, adjacent to Rancho Seco, from Charles Howard's heirs. The Nature Conservancy placed permanent protective restrictions on the property and resold the land to a local cattleman.

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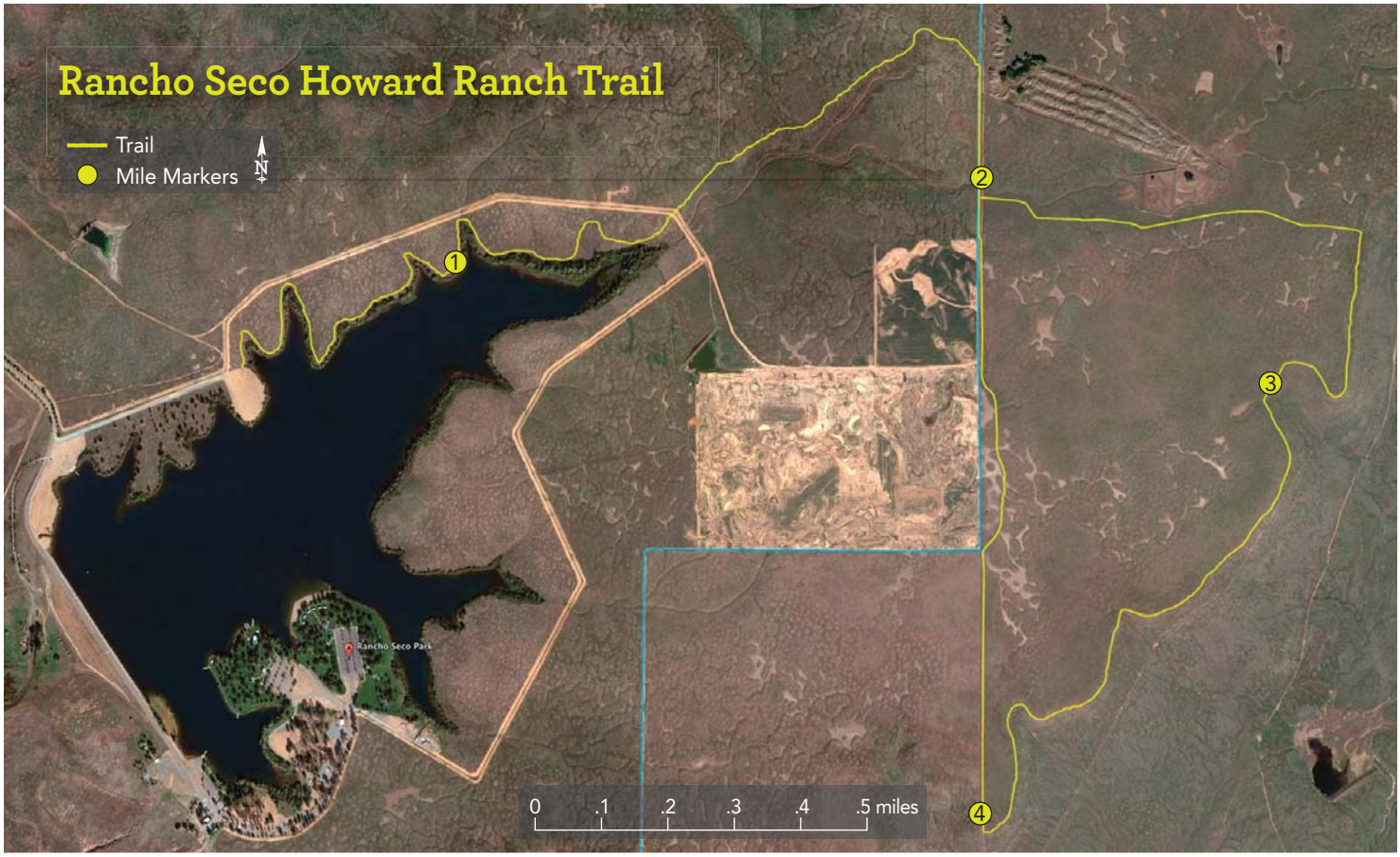


The trail accomplishes major objectives for both organizations. TNC is dedicated to preserving biodiversity throughout the world. SMUD supports environmental protection, one of our core values. The trail gives visitors a chance to learn about the natural habitat in southeast Sacramento County.

The Nature Conservancy is an international nonprofit membership organization, whose mission is to preserve plants, animals, and natural communities by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive. Founded in 1951, The Nature Conservancy has conserved more than 117 million acres of land and 5,000 miles of river worldwide. For more information on the Conservancy's work in California, visit nature.org/california.

While the trail is a hiker's paradise, Howard Ranch remains a working private cattle ranch. Visitors are advised to keep to the trail, and to leave dogs and bikes at home. Hikers should also carry water, wear a hat and use sunscreen and be on the lookout for ticks.

The entrance gate at Rancho Seco Recreational Area opens at 7:00 a.m. daily. November through March, the gate closes at 3:30 p.m., and April through October, the gate closes at 6:00 p.m. Gate entry is $10 per car. Visit **smud.org/ranchoseco** for more information.



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