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Sonoma Mountain trail set for fall completion

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Sometime next fall, the carving of a Bay Area Ridge Trail segment across Sonoma Mountain will be completed, allowing hikers access to one of the highest peaks in the county for the first time.

Construction of the \$1.4 million project involving a 4.25 mile trail portion, road improvements, parking area and trailhead is expected to start in June or July.

The trailhead would start east of Petaluma off Sonoma Mountain Road at Jacobs Ranch, cross four properties protected through easement or purchase by the county open space district and end up in Jack London State Park.

"Sonoma Mountain now joins the ring of Bay Area summits that provide public access," said Board of Supervisors Chairwoman Valerie Brown.

Land conservation activists say the North Slope Sonoma Mountain Ridge Trail is a significant juncture in the decade-long effort to create 550 miles of trail ringing the San Francisco Bay, from Gilroy to Berkeley and from Napa to the Marin Headlands.

Officials with the Bay Area Ridge Trail Council say the addition of the newest trail portion means that over half of the 57-mile length in Sonoma County has been developed. The council's goal is to have a trail that runs from Helen Putnam Regional Park near Petaluma, crosses Sonoma Mountain, passes through Jack London and Annadel state parks, sweeps through Hood Mountain and Sugarloaf Ridge before entering Napa County.

"Trails sometimes take a long time to nurture," said Janet McBride, the council's executive director.

Supervisors last Tuesday approved a key portion of the project when they agreed to an \$80,000 contract with the council for trail design, project development and construction supervision. They also approved spending \$50,000 on a contract with the Conservation Corps North Bay to use at-risk youth, ages 18 to 24, to clear invasive plants, cut brush and assist in trail construction.

Officials have said trail construction will be complicated because of an 800-foot elevation rise and requirements for retaining walls, switchbacks, climbing turns, drainage ditches and log barriers. The 4-foot-wide trail will cross Matanzas Creek, several seasonal streams and requires construction of at least three bridges.

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