

COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
Parks Department



DATE: September 25, 2014

COMMISSION MEETING DATE: October 2, 2014

TO: Parks and Recreation Commission

FROM: Marlene Finley, Parks Director

SUBJECT: Honoring Ollie Mayer

RECOMMENDATION:

Review and recommend to the Board of Supervisors to name the northernmost vista point of the Devil's Slide Trail Park as "The Ollie Mayer Vista Point" and to be identified as such at the vista point and in future publications highlighting the Devil's Slide Trail Park.

BACKGROUND:

Ollie Mayer was considered one of the most active and successful environmentalists on the San Francisco Peninsula, having worked extensively with the Loma Prieta Chapter of the Sierra Club for decades. She was involved in many local environmental struggles and was noted for her success in preserving San Mateo coastal resources, opposing controversial logging practices and extending hiking trails in San Mateo County.

(Attached are copies of obituaries from the San Jose Mercury News and The Almanac that illustrate the breadth and extended commitment she made as a leading environmentalist and an advocate for construction of a tunnel at Devil's Slide.)

DISCUSSION:

Ollie Mayer was widely known as a champion for a safe, secure repair of the Devil's Slide area of Highway 1. This meant she was vehemently opposed to the Highway 1 Bypass Project over Montara Mountain that had originally been promoted. When the possibility of a tunnel solution was presented and approved by an overwhelming vote in San Mateo County, Ollie Mayer was viewed as one of the primary leaders of the movement. She died shortly before the actual opening of the Tom Lantos Tunnels at Devil's Slide, but her spirit was clearly present with the many people who attended and spoke about her legacy.

Supervisor Don Horsley, representing the Third District, is requesting that the northernmost vista point created at the new Devil's Slide Trail Park be named "The Ollie Mayer Vista Point" and be identified as such at the site and in future publications highlighting the Devil's Slide Trail Park.

Through collaboration with family members and Supervisor Horsley's staff, the Department will support the development of proper signage for the Vista Point so that all visitors to the area will learn about the impact Ollie Mayer had on the environment of San Mateo County during her life.

FISCAL IMPACT:

It is anticipated that the costs incurred for signage will be funded by private supporters.

Ollie Mayer, Woodside environmentalist, remembered for Devils Slide, other campaigns

By Aaron Kinney akinney@bayareanewsgroup.com

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MercuryNews.com

WOODSIDE -- If you've ever hiked a trail on the San Mateo County coast, chances are you have benefited in some way from the work of Ollie Mayer.

Mayer fought timber companies to preserve redwood groves, helped found Pescadero Creek County Park, and mentored scores of budding environmentalists during several decades as an activist with the Sierra Club and other organizations. A tenacious protector of the natural resources on the coast, Mayer died last week of heart failure at the age of 94.

Ollie Hendricks grew up in New Jersey and New York before attending Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, where she was one of the first women to graduate with an engineering degree. It was there that she discovered her love of the outdoors. She met her husband, Henry Mayer, while on a solo exploration of the Rocky Mountains in 1941.

Henry first saw Ollie, their daughter Judy O'Brien said, when she strolled into a lodge on a rainy day in Estes Park, Colo. Undeterred by the weather, she declared with a smile, "I want to go on a hike!"

"He said he fell in love with her instantly," recalled O'Brien, 62.

The couple married and moved west, settling in Woodside. Henry Mayer became a prominent physician, helping to found Sequoia Hospital in Redwood City.

Ollie Mayer started her own machine shop, then founded a science-education company that produced hands-on kits for schools. She eventually sold the business, turning her full attention to environmental causes in the late 1960s.

Mayer started fighting more than 40 years ago to prevent Caltrans from building a freeway bypass at Devils Slide, promoting tunnels instead. Caltrans finally opened the Devils Slide tunnels Tuesday, just days after her death.

"She was visionary and persistent," recalled Lennie Roberts, who worked with Mayer on the Devils Slide campaign beginning in the early 1970s. "She was very smart."

Mayer was a longtime leader of the Loma Prieta chapter of the Sierra Club. In 1983 the national Sierra Club recognized her with its special achievement award.

The family will hold a private ceremony in May for Mayer, who is survived by two children, Judy O'Brien and Robert Mayer, and four grandchildren. Donations can be made in her memory to the Committee for Green Foothills, Loma Prieta chapter of the Sierra Club or the Peninsula Open Space Trust.

Contact Aaron Kinney at 650-348-4357. Follow him at [Twitter.com/kinneytimes](https://twitter.com/kinneytimes).

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Woodside environmentalist Ollie Mayer dies at 94

She was a leading environmentalist and advocate for Devil's Slide tunnel

The Devil's Slide tunnel groundbreaking in 2005 was a triumph for Olive Mayer of Woodside. She wasn't there to cheer the tunnels completion at the party held March 25, 2013, however. Ms. Mayer died March 20 of heart failure. She was 94.

Back in 1971, Ms. Mayer and the Sierra Club were proposing a tunnel to bypass the notorious section of Highway 1 around Devil's Slide, between Pacifica and Half Moon Bay, according to an article in the May 18, 2005 issue of the Almanac. Instead, Caltrans planned to build a four-lane freeway bypass at Devil's Slide. Ms. Mayer and the Sierra Club brought a lawsuit, the first of several, that stopped the highway bypass.

"Without Ollie, we wouldn't be getting a tunnel. The bypass would have happened," said April Vargas, a Coastside leader in the campaign to build a tunnel, at the time. "She continues to inspire people. That is her great gift."

Olive Hendricks grew up in New Jersey and New York before attending Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, where she was one of the first women to graduate with an engineering degree.

While on a hiking vacation in Colorado, she met her future husband, Henry Mayer. They married in December 1941, three weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor. After the war, the Mayers settled in Woodside and Dr. Mayer started his medical practice in Redwood City.

Ms. Mayer learned to love San Mateo County's rural Coastside, hiking its trails and absorbing its beauty. In the 1960s and 1970s, she led hikes of schoolchildren, scouts, and parents.

"I saw erosion, logging, the terrible condition of streams," she said. "Then I began to get interested in politics."

Ollie Mayer's legacies stretch far beyond the Devil's Slide tunnels. She founded the San Mateo County branch of the Sierra Club and fought for conservation on many fronts, including serving a term on the Woodside Town Council in the 1970s.

In a 2003 statement, the Loma Prieta chapter of the Sierra Club said Ms. Mayer's greatest missions included: preserving the San Mateo coastal resources; opposing illegal and highly destructive logging practices; and extending the trails in San Mateo County.

In 1983 the national Sierra Club recognized her with its special achievement award.

Ms. Mayer is survived by her children, Judy O'Brien and Robert Mayer, and four grandchildren. Her husband, Dr. Henry Mayer, died in 2009. A private memorial is planned for May.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Committee for Green Foothills, Loma Prieta chapter of the Sierra Club, or the Peninsula Open Space Trust.

Photos



Olive Mayer. ==I Photo courtesy Loma Prieta Chapter of Sierra Club.==