

# HIKING CATALINA

ANA VENEGAS, FILE PHOTO

## 27-mile trail expansion brings new routes, amenities to island.

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STAFF WRITER

The latest – and likely last – major expansion of trails on Santa Catalina Island will give visitors plenty of options to cut a path through the island's oft-neglected backcountry.

Work on the trails began in mid-October as part of a plan called Trekking Catalina, which will add nearly 27 miles of trails throughout the island's backcountry. The new pathways will be scattered along the island's existing trails, creating smaller loops out of major hiking thoroughfares like the Trans-Catalina Trail.

The trail expansion will be a perk for visitors exploring the 42,000 acres of open space on the island, said Tony Budrovich, president and CEO of the Catalina Island Conservancy.

"The island has a good percentage of hiking trails on it, but it's a tough island to hike," he said.

This is the largest trails project since 2009, when the 37-mile-plus Trans-Catalina Trail opened, and it will likely be the last major expansion of trails on the island, Budrovich said.

Ideally, all the trails would open by summer, but weather and other factors during the construction phase could delay that date. Along with creating new trails, the conservancy will install five restrooms in the island's open space, and with additional funding,

that could increase to eight facilities, Budrovich said.

### EXPANSION FOR VISITORS

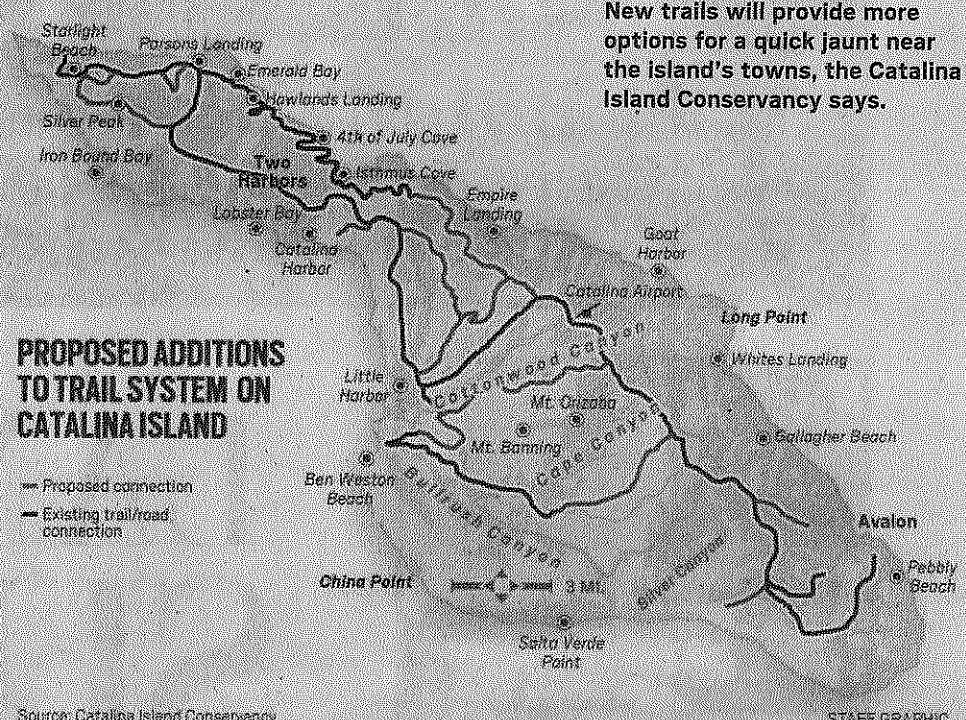
Adding trails was a common suggestion from visitors. Visitors to the island's main areas like Avalon or Twin Harbors wanted a way to enjoy other parts of Catalina without committing to an arduous trek, he said.

Rather than be forced to commit to a daylong or multiday hike along one of the island's existing routes, the new extensions will give visitors greater options to spend a few hours walking through Catalina's open space before heading back to a nearby town.

Of the estimated 1 million visitors to Catalina annually, only about 20,000 took advantage of the island's hiking in 2015, Budrovich said. And while the new trails might not lead to a significant jump in tourism, he said, they could improve the island's image among hiking communities.

The trails are being designed around the natural footpaths established by deer and bison on the island, and other paths cut by hikers making their way to points of interest not on the current trails, he said.

"When people come to the island now, they meander to the points that they or others feel are important to see," Budrovich said. "By formalizing the trail ... we'll turn that into a firm surface."



Source: Catalina Island Conservancy

STAFF GRAPHIC

New trails will provide more options for a quick jaunt near the island's towns, the Catalina Island Conservancy says.

### STAYING ON PATHS

Creating official trails has the added benefit of discouraging hikers from creating any more of their own paths, he said.

Building trails might be the easier end of the equation; designing the meandering loops for hikers required about 10 drafts to balance public access with the need to protect the island's biological resources, he said. Designers took into account habitats of animals such as the island fox, which was listed as endangered until conservation efforts built up its population in recent years.

Trekking Catalina also will include

new signs and other improvements around the island. Clear directions and signs to educate visitors on conservation and the island in general are a boon, Budrovich said.

These improvements come on the heels of the June groundbreaking for the Catalina Conservancy's new visitor center, The Trailhead. Part of the island's Imagine Catalina strategic plan, which also encompasses Trekking Catalina, The Trailhead will give visitors a focal point for information on activities on Catalina and education from the conservancy.