

Creating Golden Gate National Recreation Area and Continuing Involvement

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BAY AREA RESIDENTS HAVE BEEN STEWARDS OF OUR LANDSCAPE FOR MORE THAN 100 YEARS. In 1970, when I began working with Sierra Club leader Edgar Wayburn to protect the land that became the Golden Gate National Parks, we built upon the efforts of San Francisco's mayors who set aside Golden Gate Park and other city parks in the 1870s and the Kent family who donated Muir Woods in 1907. Army land at the Golden Gate preserved the scenery of the western entrance to the United States.

In 1970, President Nixon, Interior Secretary Walter Hickel, and members of Congress realized that the guns and missiles at the Golden Gate could no longer provide for national defense. In a marvelously foresighted bi-partisan effort, the federal government worked to establish "National Parks for the people, where the people are—in the urban areas." The New York-New Jersey harbor, Santa Monica Mountains, Cuyahoga Valley, and the Chattahoochee River were part of this program.

The Presidio of San Francisco is at the center of the group of national parks that includes the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA), Muir Woods National Monument, and Fort Point National Historic Site. In 1972, the Presidio was an active Army post, but its productivity was waning. Some of its sub-posts had been declared excess to military needs. The GGNRA's enabling legislation provided that if the army closed the Presidio, the post would become part of the national park system. Closure came in 1994.

By that time the Golden Gate National Parks had almost reached their present size of 80,000 acres, from the top of Marin County in the north, along the ocean coast of San Francisco, and half-way down the San Mateo County coast to the south. A comprehensive program of partnerships and stewardship had been underway for over 15 years and the Park Service and the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy had found many ways for residents to support their parks.

What is the Parks Conservancy? Our first superintendent, Bill Whalen, knew that the usual gift shop park cooperating association would not provide enough support for a park requiring extensive rehabilitation, and bound to have an extraordinarily large number of visitors. Bill worked with Greg Moore, still the beloved President and CEO of the Conservancy, to start the most suc-

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successful park cooperating association in the country. During 35 years the Conservancy has raised \$350 million for park projects, mainly through philanthropy that includes grants, donations, an annual gala dinner, and also stores and cafés. The Conservancy's contributions come through direct donations and staff resources to programs like the Crissy Field Center, native plant nurseries, volunteer programs, and park stewardship. They support capital projects such as Crissy Field and Rob Hill Campground on the Presidio, and the miles of their "Trails Forever" program. They give direct financial grants to the Golden Gate National Parks. Volunteers staff visitor centers, there are docents, a habitat restoration program, cleanup crews, event assistants, painters and fence builders, placers of Legos for the Ai Wei Wei exhibit on Alcatraz—and more.

The parks' many other partners include Fort Mason Center, the Bay Area Discovery Museum, and the Marine Mammal Center. Because of so many partnerships, Bay Area residents feel their national parks belong to them. Our park campaign organization, "People for a Golden Gate National Recreation Area," was a coalition of over 65 groups, ranging from the Sierra Club to the San Francisco Apartment House Owners Association. Some people get a "not in my backyard" attitude about the number of cars in their neighborhood or are unhappy that their dogs can't run free, but for almost everyone it means that, since the beginning of this park, the inclusive campaign and implementation processes have worked to create passionate stakeholders

The Presidio was saved from development by its 1972 legislation, but keeping it saved was tough. Members of Congress moved to sell it. A realtor joked that if the government sold the Presidio, it could pay the national debt. Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi mounted a massive campaign, aided by The Presidio Council, an organization shaped largely by businessmen with nationwide connections, who reached out to their compatriots in other states for support in Congress. The Presidio's 800 historic structures and a deteriorated infrastructure was too expensive as another piece of the national park system, and its costs would have taken funds from every other national park. A new kind of public-private governance was needed. The legislation for the Presidio Trust gave the Presidio 15 years of appropriations to get rehabilitation and renting underway, and gave its board 15 years to achieve self-sufficiency—which the board accomplished.

The spirit of committed stakeholders fostered by all the park partners should have carried over to the management of the Presidio Trust, but it was not a smooth trip. As a new kind of financial and administrative entity within the national park system, the Trust had to earn the trust of the community. It took time, because the structure of the Trust's partnership often appeared closer to a private sector, corporate entity than something familiar to national park supporters. The board held only two highly structured public meetings a year with limited time for public expression, and did not engage in open discussion.

Over time, the Trust realized that this closed style did not build support for policies and proposed developments. Two proposals for art museums failed after great public outcry, mostly because the Presidio is a National Historic Landmark and each of the proposed buildings would have violated the National Historic Preservation Act. Gradually the Trust approach has become more open. The public was invited to walk with Trust staff through a site chosen for a fine Andy Goldsworthy sculpture, "Woodline." The public reviewed the plans for two sculptures on the Main Post and gave the Trust board good reasons to turn them down. Now the Trust has hired an outstanding design firm to shape the New Presidio Parklands over a redesigned highway, and has asked the public to weigh in at every step.

For people to have a stake in their parks and be committed to their preservation, they have to feel park managers listen and respond to their ideas and concerns. People need opportunities to take some responsibility for a park's well-being and invest in its future. Since I retired from the Presidio Trust board in 2003, I have convened a group called People for the Parks. It brings together conservation, education, and open space groups plus park advocates with government

agencies and park professionals. It is a forum to discuss proposed park projects, policies, and programs. In the face of complex challenges and increasing demands on our national parks to meet the needs of a growing and diverse population, the group acts as a sounding board and promotes dialogue among the Trust, the National Park Service, neighbors, and park-related organizations. It does not vote on park policies. Rather, members of this group, with accurate and sufficient information, advocate for the preservation, restoration, and interpretation of the parks' resources, individually or through their organizations.

At the Golden Gate we have a long history of taking responsibility and loving our parks. As long as park management works with park users and keeps open opportunities for them to take on responsibilities, we are confident this committed attitude will pass down through succeeding generations.