

Golden Gate National Recreation Area GMP Scoping Summary

August 16, 2006

Background on Scoping Process

The first newsletter issued in March 2006 described the Golden Gate National Recreation Area/Muir Woods National Monument General Management Plan (GMP) process. The newsletter also included a comment form that asked people their opinions on what they value and like most about the park, what they like least, their suggestions for management, their major concerns for the future of the park and any other comments they wanted to provide to the GMP team. Nearly 300 electronic and mailed comments were received in response to this newsletter. Further, five public open houses were held in April 2006 to gather additional input from the public. Focus groups with environmental, historic, and diversity organizations, as well as meetings with Native American representatives, park partners and park founders were also held to gather information about what these groups value about the park, and their concerns and ideas for the general management plan. The results of recent internal scoping meetings with park staff, in addition to meetings held in 2001 and 2003, were also included. The following is a brief summary of the major comments received during the GMP scoping process.

Summary of Scoping Comments

Special Values, What They Like Most

The majority of newsletter respondents and open house attendees were from the San Francisco Bay area. Most people believe the park is special because **they live close to it**; they appreciate the park being close to the city and the relative **ease of access** to enjoy the park resources. Visitors value the undeveloped **open space near a metropolitan setting**, especially since the park makes the area more “livable,” and provides opportunities to “unwind.”

Many also noted how much they value the amazing **natural beauty**, wide open vistas and the variety of scenery in and around the park. They emphasized the **need to protect the park’s natural scenic** character to maintain the natural beauty. **Muir Woods National Monument** was highlighted as a major contributing element to the park’s natural beauty and magnificent views. Many also thought the park was special because it protected the **unique fauna and flora**, providing a lasting legacy of our natural heritage. Respondents also noted how much they value the **cultural and historic resources** in the park and that outstanding cultural resources need to be preserved and interpreted.

Other special values of the park included the opportunities for visitors to enjoy **open space and clean air**, especially in the midst of an urban area. It was noted that the park serves as a “backbone” of open space that connects other public lands. **Quiet** and opportunities for **solitude** were specifically mentioned by many respondents as a special quality of the park. Visitors value being able to “get away” from the noise and intrusions of daily life and enjoy being able to “slow down” and **commune with nature**. The park provides a place of serenity, peace and relaxation.

In answer to the question of what scoping respondents like most about the park, two of the most mentioned topics were the **natural beauty** of the park and associated **scenic views**, along with the opportunity to explore **undeveloped open space**. Further, respondents noted how much they enjoy the **hiking** opportunities in the park as well as the overall **diversity of trail opportunities**. Visitors really enjoy the opportunities for **solitude and quiet**, especially the ability to get away from the noise and

intrusions of daily life. In addition, respondents noted how much they enjoy the natural state of the park – its **diversity of landscapes and processes**. In particular, they noted how much they enjoy **wildlife watching** opportunities and viewing **native plants**. The **educational programs** and associated **information and signage** were also noted as elements of the park that visitors really enjoy.

What They Like Least

The most frequently mentioned topic that people disliked was **transportation**. Parking, traffic, and congestion were often cited as frustrating factors, especially at Muir Woods National Monument. Many people identified the lack of public transportation options and connectivity to park sites as major issues. Residents of adjacent communities dislike the congestion that park visitors bring to area roads, which impedes local traffic.

Crowding and visitor use conflicts were frequently mentioned as problems. Many people felt that the parks were too crowded, especially Muir Woods National Monument, leading to visitor use conflicts. Mountain bikes, dogs, and horses were the most frequently identified items that caused visitor use conflict. **Resource impacts from visitor use**, particularly those recreational activities just mentioned, was another topic that people disliked. Overuse of the park and the balance between visitor access and resource preservation influenced people’s opinion of this issue.

Some people mentioned disliking the level of **maintenance** of visitor amenities, including the grounds, restrooms, trail erosion, and park facilities and structures.

Their Greatest Concerns

The most frequently mentioned concern for the future of the park was **funding**. The lack of funding has caused problems with maintenance and has affected staffing levels, both of which cause grave concern for future park management.

The **level of development and commercialization** of the parks was another major concern. People felt that overdevelopment of the park led to the loss of valuable open space and that eventually the park could be commercialized and then sold off for development.

Resource impacts from visitor use were also frequently mentioned as a concern. Many people felt that the park was being “loved to death” and that this overuse leads to **crowding** and visitor use conflicts.

Restricting public access and reducing recreation opportunities was another concern for many, particularly for mountain bikers, horse riders, and dog owners. Mountain bikers and horse riders were concerned about the availability of trails for their use and dog owners wanted to preserve their ability to let their dogs off-leash.

Deficiencies in park management, including staffing levels and maintenance concerns, were reported by some. A deficiency of park rangers and maintenance personnel were commonly cited as contributing factors. Trails are not designed appropriately for their uses, which leads to maintenance problems.

Things to Consider in the GMP

The most frequently mentioned topic for the NPS to consider in the GMP was **improved alternative transportation** opportunities. Specifically, respondents mentioned the need for easy, convenient and predictable public transportation services that connect primary park entry points and disperse visitors to the wide variety of recreational and educational opportunities throughout the park. A comprehensive

approach to transportation services would increase non-automobile access to the park and help reduce traffic impacts and enhance resource protection.

Further, respondents would like to see the NPS continue to **protect the park's unique natural and cultural resources**. Many specifically mentioned that the diversity of natural landscapes and processes need to be protected with a strategy for prioritizing preservation and restoration activities.

Some people wanted to see **more trail connections** (for all use types) in the park to increase the diversity of recreation and access opportunities. In addition, some asked for new or different opportunities for **mountain biking**, including new routes and opening existing trails to mountain bikes. There were also numerous comments on **improving the design and maintenance of trails**, particularly mountain bike trails – although, the approach on this subject varied amongst respondents (e.g., mountain bikes should only be allowed only on wide/fire road type trails versus narrow, single track trails). **Off-leash dog walking** opportunities was also mentioned as something to consider in the GMP, both in terms of increasing off-leash dog opportunities as well as further restricting existing opportunities. Some people wanted **more signs, maps, and interpretive/education programs** about the park's history, and cultural and natural resources.

Other topics mentioned included the need to **increase NPS funding**, overall **maintenance of facilities and levels of staffing**, especially rangers in the field. There was also mention that the NPS should **not over develop/commercialize the park**, especially as a means to generate revenue.