

Sheffield

Hi, Brian:

Thank you for the opportunity to review selected segments of the General Management Plan. I'll share my perspective with you, and if you think it will be helpful to the folks in Denver you can forward this information to them.

Let me start by apologizing for the delay in providing these comments to you. Even after reading each section carefully several times, I continue to struggle with how to phrase my feedback about the "tone" of the narrative on the visitor experience. As currently written, the Visitor Use and Experience sections (pp. 438 – 450) do little to help the reader to understand the excellence of these special places or the significance of these places to Bay Area residents. The "can do" spirit inspired by these places is absent and the entire situation looks merely daunting. Is that the purpose of a GMP?

For example, referring to redwoods as "vegetation" (p. 447) does little to convey the inspirational and symbolic value of the trees or Muir Woods. The redwoods of Muir Woods inspired a new type of conservation philanthropy, transformative institutions were chartered at Muir Woods, and millions continue to have their first national park experience at Muir Woods. The magnitude and majesty of these peerless trees is not portrayed and no particularly compelling rationale emerges to compel us to protect these redwoods now and into the future.

Similarly, calling Alcatraz "notorious" and a "popular tourist destination" does not fully represent the importance of this place to the National Park Service, San Francisco, or the millions of visitors who seek it out each year. Alcatraz is an important, must-see draw in what is arguably the country's most popular visitor destination. Alcatraz, due to its location and partners, presents an unparalleled opportunity for NPS to connect with the broadest spectrum of American and international visitors about essential ideas about freedom, sustainability, and the layers of history.

At the non-destination sites, the narrative is even less compelling. In the section that begins on page 438 (Diversity of Recreational Opportunities) little mention is made of the multitudes of active recreationists who seek out the park on a near-daily basis to enjoy nature and maintain a healthy lifestyle. In an era of increasingly sedentary living and a rapidly aging population, the importance of the places to help folks maintain healthy lifestyles could be "called out" rather than underestimated.

Similarly, scant mention is made of the diverse and outstanding array of interpretation and education programs available throughout the parks. There are multiple opportunities in many sites nearly every day of the year at the parks. Park and partner programs are excellent and many have won prestigious awards. How many other national parks have a Crissy Field Center or a Headlands Institute, or a Point Bonita YMCA? These partners and their programs connect new generations to the parks. They also serve legions who have had limited national park experiences. Surely there are statistics and "pull quotes" that can paint a picture of these important and excellent park assets that add so much to the visitors' experiences.

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These four examples serve to illustrate my major observation about the material in volume 2 of the GMP, namely that there is a consistent and systemic disconnect between the information in section 1 (background and significance) and the Visitor Use and Experience sections (pp. 438 – 450) in volume 2. This disconnect also characterizes the Part 9 sections I reviewed (Environmental Impacts) though I am providing no examples here.

The “disconnect” is all the more disconcerting, in part, because the material in Part 1 (volume 1) is so inspiring. When reading the front material of the GMP one gets a clear sense of how important these parklands are to people, the National Park Service, and our continued efforts to live within the limits of the land. There is inspiring language about how people came together to secure a future for these parklands and how that legacy of citizen involvement will support NPS in its authorized role in preserving these parklands into the future.

If any of these comments resonate, I believe there are several ways to address them in the next iteration of the GMP.

1. Connecting the narrative in volume 2 to the information contained in section 1 (background) would help the reader better understand the importance and significance of these landscapes. Much of this could be incorporated with stronger transitions and parenthetical phrases.
2. Connecting the narrative in volume 2 to the guiding principles of sustainability, community-based stewardship, civic engagement, partnerships, regional partnership, and inclusion will ground the narrative in the “can do” spirit of these parks. These guidelines, properly deployed, will enable park managers to manage and lead effectively in the future.
3. More personal quotes and testimonials embedded into the narrative will enable the reader to better understand the values that people ascribe to and derive from these places.
4. Incorporating more of the “meaning” data from the studies at Alcatraz and Muir Woods will help to illustrate the importance and significance of these places to visitors. The trail studies also contain more good information that could be included in the visitor experience analysis.
5. Finally, reports from the 2008 Visitor Survey are available for internal planning purposes. In addition to providing the most comprehensive look at visitation at non-destination sites, the data also enrich our understanding about the meanings that people attach to their experiences at Ocean Beach, Crissy Field, and the Presidio.

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If you elect to forward these comments to the folks in Denver please do so with my respect and appreciation for all the work that has been invested to date. As I compare the earlier versions of Part 1 with their current iterations, I am heartened by refinement and elevation of the ideas that folks have wrestled with throughout the GMP process. I'm sure the more recent sections will be similarly refined as the process moves forward.

As always, I appreciate the opportunity to engage, in some small way, with the future of these most marvelous national park sites.