



Foundation Document Overview

Golden Gate National Recreation Area

California



Contact Information

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Description



Golden Gate National Recreation Area is one of the largest urban parks in the world. The park's extensive collection of natural, historic, and scenic resources and diverse recreational opportunities fulfill the purpose of bringing "parks to the people," particularly to the 7 million people who live in the San Francisco Bay Area. Today, however, the resources of Golden Gate National Recreation Area are nationally and internationally recognized as well, extending their value to all of the United States and beyond.

The recreation area stretches across three counties in California's San Francisco Bay Area: Marin, San Francisco, and San Mateo. In total, the park is composed of more than 80,000 acres of land spread across numerous park sites, many of which are in urban San Francisco. Stewardship of the park and the provision of visitor services are a team effort at Golden Gate National Recreation Area. National Park Service staff achieve their mission through collaboration, cooperative relationships, and partnerships with other agencies and organizations, including the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy; California State Parks; Presidio Trust; and a variety of local, state, and federal agencies.

The recreation area contains a stunning variety of cultural and natural features for visitors to enjoy, including Alcatraz Island and Crissy Field. The park's historic and cultural assets chronicle centuries of overlapping history, with themes such as American Indian culture, the frontier of the Spanish empire, the California Gold Rush, the evolution of American coastal fortifications, World War II, Buffalo Soldiers, and the growth of modern-day San Francisco.

The Golden Gate Bridge, constructed in the 1930s, is the most recognizable landmark in the region. The bridge and its plaza receive millions of visitors annually. Situated at the northern tip of the San Francisco Peninsula, the Presidio has been part of Golden Gate National Recreation Area since 1994. For more than 200 years, the Presidio area was used as a military base, first by Spain in the late 1700s, briefly by Mexico in the 1800s, and by the United States from 1846 onward.

Golden Gate National Recreation Area is widely known for its rich natural resources as well. The park helps protect parts of 19 separate ecosystems and numerous watersheds. It is also home to more than 1,250 plant and animal species, including many sensitive, rare, threatened, and endangered species such as the mission blue butterfly, northern spotted owl, and California red-legged frog. Golden Gate National Recreation Area lands are also coastal preserves that encompass many miles of bay and ocean shoreline.

Golden Gate National Recreation Area offers something for everyone: ranger-led programs, photography, horseback riding, bicycling, hiking, swimming, and dog walking, to name a few. Each year, more than 17 million visitors come to explore the park and enjoy these activities. These visitors annually contribute more than \$260 million to the local economy and support 1,500 local jobs, making the park a key part of quality of life, environmental health, and economic prosperity in the Bay Area.



Park Map



Purpose



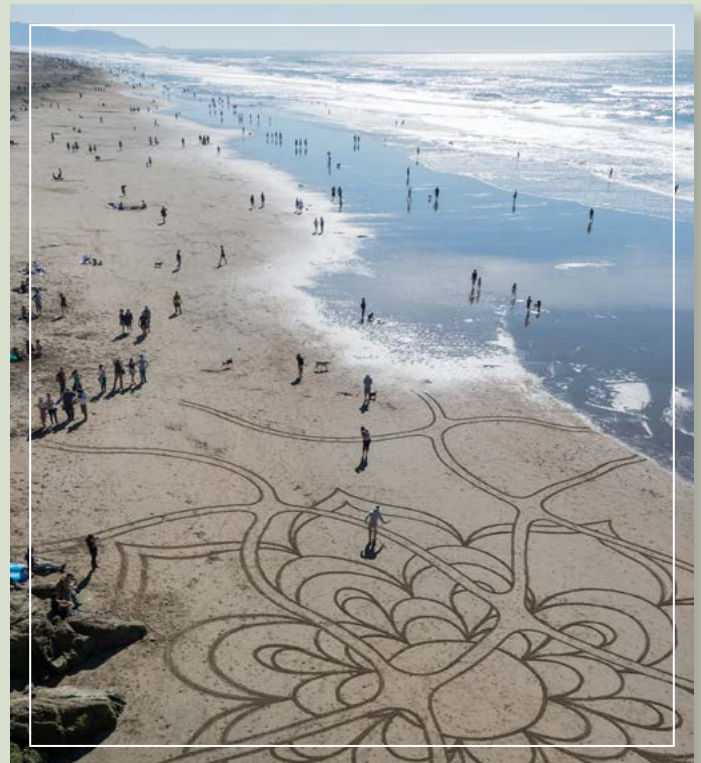
The purpose of GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA is to offer national park experiences to all, including a large and diverse urban population, while preserving and interpreting the outstanding natural, historic, scenic, and recreational values of the park lands.



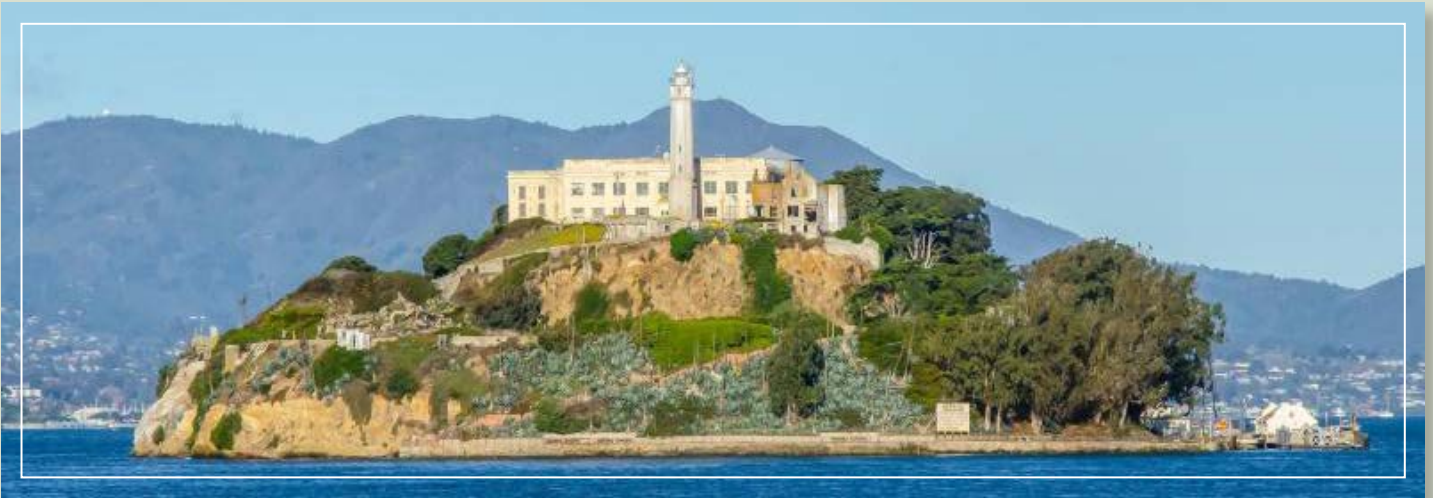
Significance

Significance statements express why Golden Gate National Recreation Area resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- **Recreational and Educational Opportunities.** The continuum of park resources at the doorstep of the San Francisco Bay Area provides an abundance of recreational and educational opportunities.
- **Coastal Corridor.** The remnant of undeveloped coastal corridor comprising marine, estuarine, and terrestrial ecosystems supports exceptional native biodiversity and provides refuge for one of the largest concentrations of rare, threatened, and endangered species in the national park system.



Significance



- **Alcatraz Island.** Alcatraz Island, the site of pre-Civil War-era fortifications, was the nation's first military prison, which later became the most notorious maximum security penitentiary in the United States, and subsequently was the site of the occupation that helped ignite the movement for American Indian self-determination.
- **Military Installations and Fortifications.** The park includes one of the largest and most complete collections of military installations and fortifications in the United States, dating from Spanish settlement in 1776 through the 20th century. These installations have served as command posts for the U.S. Army in the western United States and the Pacific Ocean. This long period of military presence has yielded one of the most extensive collections of historic architecture in the national park system.
- **Scenic Beauty.** The diverse park lands of Golden Gate National Recreation Area have long been recognized for their outstanding scenic qualities. The rich interplay of built environments and undeveloped natural landscapes, combined with the remarkable convergence of land, ocean, and bay, create a spectacle that is truly unique.
- **Physical Landforms.** The convergence of the San Andreas Fault, San Francisco Bay at the Golden Gate, and the California coastline creates a dynamic environment of exceptional scientific value.
- **Coast Miwok and Ohlone People.** Park lands are within the traditional homelands of the Coast Miwok and Ohlone people. They comprise indigenous archeological sites of native heritage and historic and scientific values.

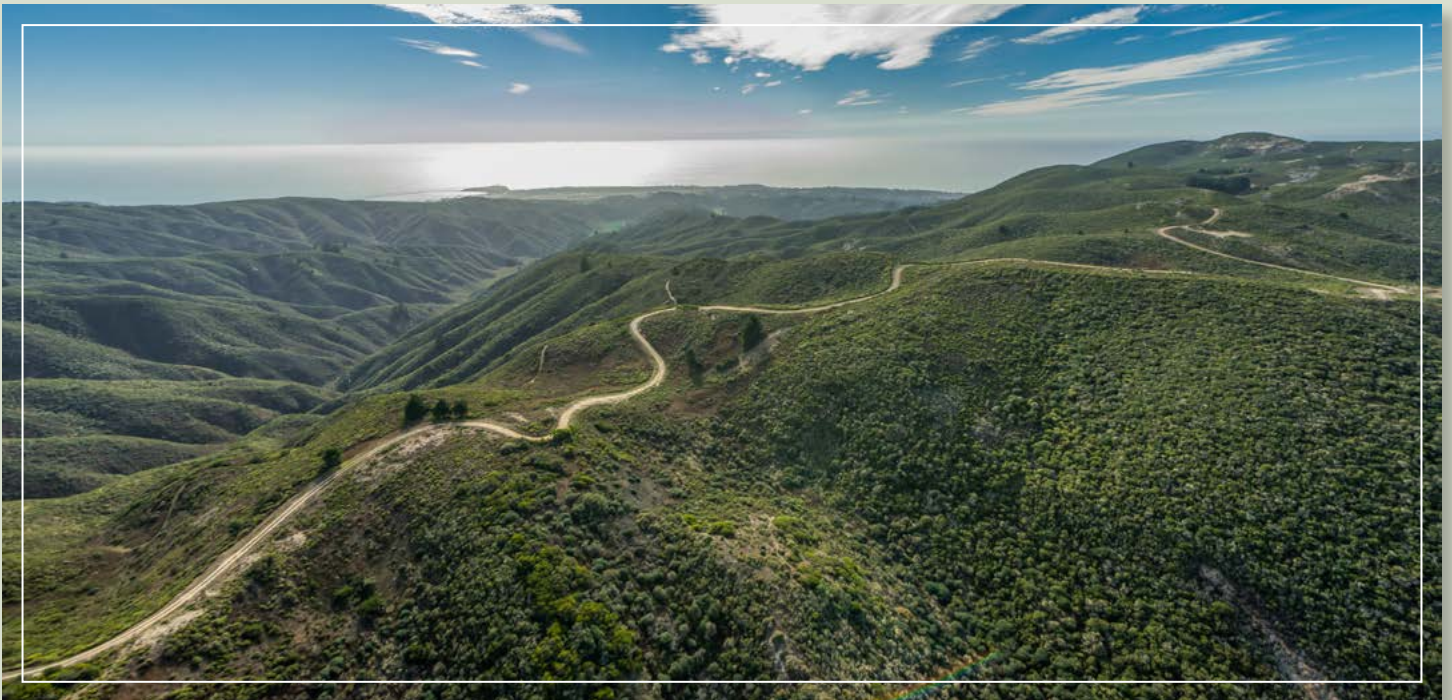
Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Diverse Park Settings.** The diversity of settings, from remote to urban, provides visitors with active and passive recreational and educational opportunities, including participation in park stewardship.
- **Park Access.** A system of designated trails and scenic park roads supports access to sites that provide visitors with a broad range of activities and varied experiences.
- **Ocean and Bay Environment.** Oceanic conditions, such as tides, currents, waves, surf, upwelling, and sea level, influence Golden Gate National Recreation Area's coastal environment, including climate and the land.
- **Coastal Ecosystems.** Golden Gate National Recreation Area contains a rich assemblage of coastal native plant and animal habitats that includes forests, coastal scrub, grassland, freshwater, estuarine, and nearshore marine habitats, beaches, coastal cliffs, and islands.



- **Threatened and Endangered Species.** Golden Gate National Recreation Area supports one of the largest numbers of federally listed threatened and endangered species in the national park system. This island of refuge is due to the protected confluence of unique and diverse habitats adjacent to the urban Bay Area.
- **Water Resources.** Golden Gate National Recreation Area's water resources support coastal corridor ecosystems, which consist of groundwater sources (aquifers and springs); freshwater systems (streams, lakes, and ponds); coastal, estuarine, and marine water resources (the Pacific Ocean and San Francisco Bay); and other wetlands.



Fundamental Resources and Values



- **Military Installations and Fortifications.** Golden Gate National Recreation Area includes cultural landscapes, historic structures, archeological sites, and museum collections, including historic fortifications and military installations.
- **Alcatraz Island.** Alcatraz Island has cultural landscapes, historic structures, archeological sites, museum collections, and stories associated with its use as a Civil War-era fort, a military prison, a federal penitentiary, and as the site of the American Indian occupation of 1969 to 1971.



- **Dramatic Settings.** In concert with the open lands that frame it, the Golden Gate serves as the backdrop to the San Francisco metropolitan area. The dynamic contrast between urban environments and undeveloped spaces ranging from the open waters of the Pacific Ocean and San Francisco Bay to beaches, estuaries, headlands, and valleys contribute greatly to the scenic experience enjoyed by area residents and visitors alike.
- **Compelling Historical Stage.** With its exceptional diversity of natural settings and central role in many significant chapters from America's past, the Golden Gate instills a continuous sense of wonder and appreciation.
- **Geologic Resources.** Golden Gate National Recreation Area's geologic resources include faults, plate margins, and a subduction zone; a diversity of rock types and deposits representing more than 100 million years of Earth's history; and complex geologic processes that continue to shape the landscape.
- **Archeological Sites.** Sites in the park document the traditional homelands of the Coast Miwok and Ohlone people.

Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- **Recreational and Educational Opportunities.** The park provides diverse recreational and educational opportunities from contemplative to active pursuits, including participation in stewardship and volunteer activities. Its proximity allows an urban population to connect with nature and history.
- **Coastal Corridor.** In a world of diminishing biological diversity and threatened natural resources, Golden Gate National Recreation Area preserves islands of biodiversity within and near a large urban area. The accelerating rate of global climate change threatens even these remnants.
- **Military Installations and Fortifications.** Coast defense posts are at the heart of park lands and are a major reason the park is preserved today. Although no hostile shot was ever fired, every major type of military fortification and architecture represented here demonstrates evolving defense technology. War, peace, and the nature of protection have shaped the country in the past and will continue to do so.



- **Alcatraz Island.** The layers of history so evident on the island offer visitors an opportunity to understand the 155-year span of Alcatraz history—from the U.S. Army period through the federal penitentiary era and the American Indian occupation to current NPS management of the island. As a site of international notoriety, Alcatraz Island provides a powerful opportunity to encourage visitors to contemplate their personal views on crime and punishment, the judicial system, national defense, and freedom.
- **Scenic Beauty.** The powerful positive influences that park land and undisturbed open space can exert on urban settings (and residents) constitute an important interpretive message. The scenic beauty of the park’s historic and natural undeveloped landscapes inspired a grassroots movement that led to their protection. Proposed development that would have destroyed these lands sparked Bay Area community members to organize and ultimately preserve the open spaces that contribute so much to their quality of life.
- **Physical Landforms.** The park’s underlying natural geologic systems and processes and the resulting effects on people and the environment link the park to the highly visible and significant geologic forces around the world.
- **Coast Miwok and Ohlone People.** The natural features and resources of the park, along with its location on the San Francisco Bay estuary, sustained the Coast Miwok and Ohlone people for thousands of years before Europeans arrived. Archeological sites in the park link to these pre-European inhabitants and to their descendants who retain a vibrant culture to this day.

