

Golden Gate National Recreation Area
Statement of Significance
July, 2005

The significance of Golden Gate National Recreation Area relates directly to its purpose. The founders of the park intended that it serve to bring national park experiences to urban populations. The park's diverse and extensive collection of "outstanding natural, historic, scenic and recreation values" is not only adequate to fulfill this purpose, but they represent an exceptional range of national park quality resources and interpretive themes. Each of these is significant in its own right, but their greater collective value is derived from their proximity to the metropolitan Bay Area.

The primary significance of Golden Gate National Recreation Area is:

The park is a concentrated occurrence of exceptional national park resources in close proximity to millions of people.

The key elements of the park are so varied that managers often argue over which are most important. But the landmark that gives the park its name offers the key to unifying all of them. Few geological landmarks have exerted more widespread influence on natural and cultural processes than the Golden Gate- the landform that marks the entrance to San Francisco Bay. Its unique configuration has shaped ecosystems and defined thousands of years of history and prehistory. Virtually all of the park's significant resources derive their character and very existence from this iconic feature, now overshadowed by a legendary bridge. The significance of these resources is described in the following statements:

Golden Gate National Recreation Area protects an undeveloped remnant coastal corridor of marine, estuarine and terrestrial ecosystems that support exceptional native biodiversity and provide a refuge for one of the largest concentrations of rare, threatened and endangered species in the national park system.

Golden Gate National Recreation Area has the largest and most complete collection of military installations and fortifications in the country, dating from Spanish settlement in 1776 through the 20th century, and once serving as command post for the Army in the Western United States and the Pacific. This long period of military presence has yielded one of the most extensive collections of historic architecture in the national park system.

Alcatraz Island, constructed as a Civil War fortification, was the nation's first military prison, later becoming the most infamous maximum security penitentiary in the United States.

Golden Gate National Recreation Area preserves agricultural land, some of which has been in continuous use for more than 200 years. The structures and rural landscapes that reflect this use are not only historically important, but are also remnants of a rapidly disappearing scene.

The outstanding scenic landscapes and vistas offered in the coastal environment of the Golden Gate and the lands and waters radiating from it comprise an internationally recognized attraction. The dramatic contrast between this greenbelt and the urban scene is also widely recognized as a significant contributor to the quality of life in the Bay Area.

The park's extensive building resources and diverse landscapes, ranging from small houses to barracks and balloon hangars, and urban to wilderness-quality settings, provide a full range of recreation and educational opportunities.