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To: [Howard Levitt](#); [Frank Dean](#); [Aaron Roth](#); [Nancy Hornor](#); [Brian Aviles](#)
Subject: Point Reyes Light story about GMP
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On first glance, not terrible even with Laura Pandapas in there. Some good point/ counter point in there. Great job Howard.

Alex

GGNRA addresses varied lands in guiding plan

By Samantha Kimmey 02/19/2015

A plan to guide the management of Golden Gate National Recreation Area for the next 20 years, based on dividing 80,000 acres of park land across three counties into zones based on different values like natural resources or heavily developed uses, was finalized a few weeks ago after a nine-year process.

Critics of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area's new management plan point to the area's enabling legislation, passed in 1974, to argue that the area's core purpose—recreation—has been unjustly marginalized. But the park points to the same language to argue the opposite: although recreation is one of the park's major purposes, the legislation doesn't prioritize recreation over conservation.

The plan was made official at the end of January when Christine Lehnertz, the director of the Pacific West Region of the National Park Service, signed the Record of Decision. It responded to some lingering concerns over dog walking and fears of visitation impacts around Muir Woods, but said arguments about recreation and the park's purpose had no merit and had been addressed in the final plan—the first update since the original was implemented in 1980.

The plan is grounded in eight different management zones to direct oversight and projects throughout lands in Marin, San Francisco and San Mateo. The zones specify how the park will care for different areas, with varying emphases on nature, history, interpretation, cultural landscapes, sensitive resources, park operations, scenery and “diverse opportunities.”

In Marin County, areas like Stinson Beach and Slide Ranch are diverse opportunity zones; there is less of an emphasis on preserving ecological functions and on a nature-based experience compared to a natural zone.

Park lands just north of Stinson Beach, particularly near Bolinas Lagoon, are natural zones. Muir Beach, too, is a natural zone, and will be managed, the plan says, to preserve or improve the dunes and other habitat.

In general, the plan says it aims to improve facilities at sites like the Marin Headlands as well as fix up trails, trail heads, parking lots, campsites, restrooms and other facilities.

But those kinds of improvements depend on future funding for specific projects; the plan estimates that capital improvements in all three counties—not including at Muir Woods National Monument and Alcatraz Island—would cost about \$50 million.

A draft of the plan released in 2011 drew criticism, in part, because of the management zones. People worried that the zones placed too heavy an emphasis on natural resource protection instead of recreation. The designation of “natural” zones vexed dog walkers, who feared they might eventually be banned from them, as well as those who believed recreation in general would be highly restricted.

The final version of the plan amended descriptions of the natural zones, removing language that the park wanted to create a “backcountry”-type experience in them. In response to the criticism, the final plan said the point was not to create “pristine wilderness-like areas.”

Despite the changed language, some critics believe calling areas where people recreate a “natural” zone is setting the stage for more restrictions in the future.

Laura Pandapas, a Muir Beach resident who has been involved with a group protesting the plan, cited a description of natural zones in the plan that gave her pause. In natural zones, it says, visitors can be “immersed in a natural environment and could seek areas where they could experience natural sounds, tranquility, closeness to nature, and a sense of remoteness and self-reliance. Visitor use would be managed to ensure that activities and their intensities are compatible with protecting resource integrity.”

The natural zone doesn’t prohibit any specific activity, and the plan lists a host that now occur within natural zones, including swimming, fishing, surfing, camping, hiking and horseback riding.

But Ms. Pandapas is still worried that future efforts to protect resources could come at the cost of recreation. “It’s this idea that it’s going to be so highly managed that things it’s typically used for will start to get weeded out,” she said.

The park, in short, says those fears are unfounded. “A whole variety of recreation uses, currently and in the future, are in areas we designate as natural,” said Howard Levitt, the communications director for the recreation area. “We felt there was no basis to say this plan was anti-recreation when it’s exactly the opposite. It’s an affirmation of recreation as a purpose of this park.”

Calling a place like Muir Beach natural, he said, reflects the absence of major development in the area. “Those zones, they describe more or less the current condition within the zones... Muir Beach is a beautiful, natural area, and I think almost everyone would characterize it like that.”

Mr. Levitt also sees those disputing the plan as unrepresentative of most Bay Area residents. “Most people recognize that this plan is an inspired vision for the future that carries on the traditions of use within the park, but protects resources for the future, which is what people want to see. They want to see what they love protected,” he said.

But the final plan also made clear the importance of conservation.

Some critics of the draft plan argued that recreation was G.G.N.R.A.’s primary purpose, and that the plan placed too great a focus on natural resources. The park’s enabling legislation says

the recreation area was established to “preserve for public use and enjoyment certain areas... possessing outstanding natural, historic, scenic and recreational values, and in order to provide for the maintenance of needed recreational open space necessary to urban environment and planning.”

Although the area was created during the system’s “parks to the people” initiative, the park service interprets that enabling legislation differently. The final plan said that the enabling legislation “does not place a priority on recreation over conservation.”

After the final plan was released in April, the park received letters continuing to express fears about the potential for curtailed recreation. It did not respond further, citing responses to those critiques in the final plan.

The Record of Decision did respond to concerns about dog walking, a controversial nixed parking plan near Muir Woods that some believed had resurfaced in the final plan, and the impacts of the plan on Muir Woods itself.

Under the general plan, Muir Woods National Monument will be managed under a special alternative for “national treasures.” To fully implement that part of the plan would cost over \$15 million in capital improvements. It would steer people away from the main trail that is now heavily used onto other trails, some yet to be built. The plan also aims to add more interpretation at the site, relocate some parking and develop a strategy to manage the crowds and attendant impacts.

In recent years, groups like the Mount Tam Task Force have voiced fears about rising visitation at Muir Woods, which topped one million last year. The nonprofit coalition wants a cap at about 750,000 to help preserve the monument. In the Record of Decision, the park responded that the general plan could not establish such a limit because it was a conceptual document; that would require a specific, project-level plan.

In late 2013, the park proposed building a parking lot on Panoramic Highway to serve Muir Woods. After public outcry that it would bring even more visitors, the plan was scrapped. But the suggestion in the new general plan of a parking lot east of the highway to facilitate transit to Muir Woods drew concerns—including from Rep. Jared Huffman—that it had reappeared. Rep. Huffman asked that the language be removed.

It wasn’t, but the Record of Decision claimed that any parking lot in the area would be small and intended to serve nearby trails, not a major lot for the monument.

As for dog walkers’ fears, the park says rules for dog walking will be set out in its forthcoming Dog Management Plan, which Mr. Levitt said could be finished in early 2016.

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