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Significant Natural Resource Areas Management Plan Overview

PLAN OBJECTIVES:

- Identify and mitigate impacts adversely affecting habitats. Enhance biological diversity, and maintain populations of sensitive species.
- Identify and prioritize restoration, management, and monitoring actions conserve plant and wildlife habitat and to provide guidelines for passive recreational amenities and uses compatible that are with natural resources.
- Guide natural resource protection, habitat restoration, trail and access improvements, other capital projects, and maintenance over the next 20 years.
- Provide guidelines for educational, research, and stewardship programs.
- Inventory the biological resources in Natural Areas to provide background information for planning, restoration, and management activities.
- Develop a Geographic Information System (GIS) database containing baseline information for each of the Natural Areas.

KEY ELEMENTS:

- Restoration of grasslands at Twin Peaks to recover the Mission Blue Butterfly.
- Upgrade trail network to expand access and protect sensitive habitat.
- Protect the Bay by improving water quality through planting and stabilizing soils.
- Remove invasive species and replace with native plants.
- Prioritizes volunteer efforts in sensitive habitats.
- Restore wetlands and create 19 acres of additional habitat for the San Francisco garter snake and the California red-legged frog at Sharp Park.
- Connect critical habitat corridor between Laguna Salada and Mori Point.
- Natural Management of over 1,000 of acres of land.
- Preserve on-leash dog access to all natural areas.
- And establish new wildlife habitat by reconfiguring off leash dog areas.



OVERVIEW:

The climate and geology of San Francisco set the stage for the evolution of a rich and diverse array of plant and animal life uniquely adapted to this area. Scattered here and there are small oases of wildlife that escaped the transformation from wild land to metropolis. These are San Francisco's natural areas, where a remarkable diversity of plants, birds, reptiles and amphibians, endangered butterflies, and mammals survive.

In the mid 1990s, in response to citizen concerns about the loss of natural resources, the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department (SFRPD) developed the Natural Areas Program to protect and manage these Natural Areas for the natural and human values they provide. The mission of the Program is to restore and enhance the 32 natural areas totaling over 1,000 acres ranging in size from less than an acre to almost 400 acres, and develop and support community-based stewardship of the sites.



Mission Blue Butterfly

What are Natural Areas and what type of recreational opportunities are available?



Natural Areas are remnants of San Francisco's historic landscape and contain the City's natural heritage. These areas support an array of native habitats and species, some found nowhere else in the world, such as the San Francisco Garter Snake and the Mission Blue Butterfly. The opportunity exists in these areas to protect and restore sensitive species and natural habitats for future generations.

San Francisco's natural areas are part of a larger mosaic of city parklands, open spaces, and facilities that provide a wide variety of recreational opportunities to residents and visitors alike. These natural areas provide an abundance of hiking opportunities with almost 30 miles of existing trails, many of which connect to broader trail networks. Many of San Francisco's natural areas are situated on hilltops and ridgelines, providing expansive views of the city, the bay, the Golden Gate, and beyond.

Why is it important to protect our Natural Areas?

Our natural areas contain irreplaceable biological communities and account for approximately one quarter of the City's open space system. Historically, one would encounter an extraordinary variety of habitats and wildlife throughout San Francisco. From Ocean Beach to North Beach, the tip of the peninsula was blanketed by great sand dunes with a patchwork of wildflowers and bunchgrasses that provided food for elk, jackrabbits,



and other creatures.

This incredible biodiversity has not disappeared completely but continued pollution, habitat loss and fragmentation, and invasive species all make it difficult for native plants and animals to survive in the city. When this happens, many of the insects, birds, and other animal species that depend on the diversity of native plants for food, shelter, and reproduction decline rapidly or even become extinct. Working alongside community stewards and volunteers, the Natural Areas Program protects our remaining wild lands by controlling the spread of invasive plants.

Every year, schools, businesses, friends groups, and individuals devote 10,000 - 15,000 hours to help restore and preserve San Francisco's natural lands. Habitat restoration and related activities invite urban dwellers to participate in the city's dynamic and enduring natural history and our Natural Areas Program aims to take care of our natural landscapes and protect the rare species and habitat that remains for generations to come.

What is the Significant Natural Resource Areas Management Plan (SNRAMP)?



Trail improvements at
Corona Heights Park

In order to protect natural resources while providing recreational opportunities, SFRPD developed a plan to guide how we steward these lands. The development of the plan has been a 10 year process that consisted of numerous meeting with over 3,000 stakeholders, environmentalists, policy makers, and park users. The Plan is a cutting-edge and innovative way to maximize our resources while minimizing impact.

The Management Plan is intended to guide natural resource protection, habitat restoration, trail and access improvements, other capital projects, and maintenance over the next 20 years. The Plan contains detailed information about the wildlife and plant habitats, species diversity, and recreational amenities in the 32 Natural Areas. The Department will utilize this Information to craft site-specific management recommendations. Implementation will help prevent the local extinction of plants and animals, improve habitat for wildlife, increase safety, and improve access and recreational use in Natural Areas.

Finally, the Significant Natural Resource Areas Management Plan is consistent with several directives, including the Recreation and Open Space Element (ROSE), the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) water saving mandates, and the City's Sustainability Plan.

How is the use of pesticides addressed?

The Natural Areas Program is an active participant in the city's award winning Pest Management Program (IPM). IPM requires an integrated approach to all pest control operations; establishing regular monitoring, accountability requirements and phased out use of the most hazardous pesticides. The Recreation Department is in constant

communication with the Department of the Environment and IPM to reduce the use of pesticides when possible. IPM also meets once a month and is populated by staff who are committed to reducing pesticide use.

The management plan determined that the health impacts associated with pesticide use were determined to be less than significant. Over the last 12 years, the Natural Areas Program has tried various treatments from hand weeding to herbicide application to control this spreading weed, but found that hand removal does not always fully and effectively remove aggressive invasive species.

We understand that some visitors, kids, and dogs might come in direct contact with the weed, so we have established some protocols to keep potential exposure at a minimum. In addition to limiting the areas impacted by the spraying and herbicide, it is one of our top priorities to continuously investigate alternative products that are effective, but do not effect the rare plants. Unfortunately, to date we have found none.



Cape Ivy overtaking the natural vegetation.

What is the recommendation about tree removal?

In some cases, restoration work involves removal of existing vegetation in order to improve habitat and allow for new growth. Although the Plan proposes the removal of some trees, all trees removed would be replaced on a 1:1 ratio.

What changes and restorations will be done at Sharp Park?

Sharp Park is a 400 acre park in Pacifica, owned and operated by the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department. 280 acres of the park are largely natural areas used for hiking, walking and dog-walking. A golf course takes up 120 acres of Sharp Park.



The San Francisco Garter Snake, an endangered species and the California Red Legged Frog, a threatened species, are both found at Sharp Park. Under the direction of the Mayor's Office and the Recreation and Park Commission and the Board of Supervisors, the Department has planned an environmental restoration that would create an additional 19 acres of snake and frog habitat while maintaining the robust recreation uses currently enjoyed at the park.

The plan would restore Laguna Salada and Horse Stable Pond, creating additional habitat for both the snake and the frog. Further, it would re-establish the connection between Mori point and the upland bodies of water to create a safe thoroughfare for the snake.

What are some of the changes to off-leash dog play areas (DPAs) in San Francisco?



Dogs are welcome on **all** Recreation and Park property, though some sensitive areas continue to be off-limits. Some dog behaviors, such as digging and chasing wildlife, can be damaging to natural areas. To further protect and preserve wild life and habitat, the Management Plan proposes changes to off-leash dog recreation in three out of the 28 currently designated off-leash DPAs in our park system (see table below): reductions in size at Bernal Hill and McLaren Park Shelley Drive Hill Top, and removal of the off-leash area at Lake Merced.

Bernal Hill includes a designated 21 acre off leash dog play area. The SMRAMP proposes to change 8 of the total 21 acres to on-leash. The proposed on-leash area corresponds to the most sensitive habitat areas (MA-1) that are located on very steep slopes, some portions of which are completely inaccessible due to vertical slopes. Several sensitive plant species grow on these slopes and the areas are prone to erosion.

McLaren Park has approximately 60 acres of off-leash dog play areas. The SNRAMP proposes an approximately 8.3 acre reduction in off-leash areas in the area known at Grey Fox Creek. This area supports a creek, considered a sensitive natural community (MA-1) and as such is critical to sustaining wildlife in the city. Dog access to the 0.8 acre willow riparian area of Grey Fox creek would be restricted in order to protect quail and breeding birds and the remaining 7 or so acres surrounding Grey Fox Creek would be converted to on-leash.



Lake Merced's existing off-leash DPA is a 5 acre mesa near Lake Merced Boulevard, which supports dune scrub habitat, making it a sensitive natural community (MA-1), as well as special status plant species and breeding white-crowned sparrows. The SNRAMP recommends that the off-leash dog area should be closed, in accordance with the SFRPD Final Dog Policy (SFRPD 2002) and SFPUC's Lake Merced Watershed Report (SFPUC 2011).

New DPA's are expected to come online in the upcoming year. As we are renovating and improving existing parks, we can determine new and increased off-leash DPAs on a case by case basis. Upcoming off-leash DPAs include Herron's Head Park, operated by the Port of SF and expected to open spring 2012 and potential off-leash area as part of the Parkmerced development.

For sensitive habitat around Grey Fox Creek - The Plan concludes that reducing the off-leash recreation is not a significant impact by itself. However, if considered with the

extensive off-leash recreation reductions proposed by the GGNRA's Dog Management Plan, the impacts of the SNRAMP are considered significant and unavoidable.

GGNRA's final plans have not been released yet and the discussion around the potential reduction might have on our park system is ongoing. The SNRAMP analysis takes this discussion into account in regards to our own DPAs and we continue to monitor their findings. We will include GGNRA's recommendations in our final plan to be released in 2012.

Off-Leash Dog Play Areas in San Francisco

	Natural Area	Existing DPA (Acres)	Remaining DPA (Acres)	Proposed Change
1	Bernal Hill (NA)	21.00	15.00	29%
2	Buena Vista Park (NA)	1.00	1.00	0%
3	Corona Heights Park (NA)	0.40	0.40	0%
4	Golden Gate Park Southeast section (NA)	2.60	2.60	0%
5	Golden Gate Park Northeast section (NA)	0.20	0.20	0%
6	Lake Merced (NA)	5.00	0.00	100%
7	McLaren Park Shelley Drive Hill Top (NA)	59.00	50.70	14%
8	McLaren Park South Entrance (NA)	0.90	0.90	0%
9	Pine Lake Park (NA)	3.30	3.30	0%
10	Alamo Square	5.00	5.00	0%
11	Alta Plaza Park	0.50	0.50	0%
12	Brotherhood Mini Park	0.80	0.80	0%
13	Crocker Amazon Playground	1.80	1.80	0%
14	Dolores Park	2.50	2.50	0%
15	Douglas Park	2.90	2.90	0%
16	Duboce Park	1.20	1.20	0%
17	Eureka Valley Park	0.30	0.30	0%
18	Golden Gate Park Northcentral area	1.40	1.40	0%
19	Golden Gate Park Southcentral area	4.40	4.40	0%
20	Jefferson Square	2.00	2.00	0%
21	Lafayette Park	1.10	1.10	0%
22	McKinley Square	0.80	0.80	0%
23	Mountain Lake Park	0.40	0.40	0%
24	Potrero Hill Mini-Park	0.40	0.40	0%
25	St Mary's Park	0.70	0.70	0%
26	Stern Grove (19th Ave & Wawona St.)	0.70	0.70	0%
27	Upper Noe Park	0.30	0.30	0%
28	Walter Haas Playground	0.30	0.30	0%
Total		120.90	101.60	15.96%

Total RPD DPA	120.90
Total proposed citywide DPA reduction	15.96%

PROCESS:

The development of the Significant Natural Resource Areas Management Plan has occurred over 10-plus years, consisting of numerous and extensive meetings with over 3,000 stakeholders to develop guidelines for land stewardship. Here a brief history of SFRPD's outreach and planning process:

1995 - 2011:

1995 - Staff Report on the Natural Areas RPD System - Recreation and Park Commission reviews a Staff Report on the Natural Areas RPD System and directs staff to do further analysis.

1998 to 2001 - *Survey of Natural Resources Conducted* - Consultants, volunteers, interns and staff conduct surveys of plants, wildlife, soils, trails and other features in the Natural Areas.

June 2002 - *Citizens Task Force (CTF) Draft Report* was prepared for preliminary review by a Green Ribbon Panel convened for the Natural Areas Program, comprised of local planning, environmental, land use and neighborhood groups.

2002 - *Natural Areas Program Citizen Advisory Committee (NAPCAC) Created* - Replacing the Green Ribbon Panel, the Board of Supervisors creates the Natural Areas Program Citizen Advisory Committee (NAPCAC) to review the CTF Draft.

2003 - *Natural Areas Program Citizen Advisory Committee (NAPCAC) does not reach consensus* - Due to a "sunset clause" the NAPCAC meet for one year but was unable to reach consensus and prepared both a "majority report" and a "minority report" providing no clear mandate or recommendation to the Board of Supervisors. SFRPD was not allowed to be a participant in the meetings to provide information and expertise.

2004 - *New Working Group Convened* - SFRPD convenes a working group with supporters and opponents of the plan. This "ad hoc" group was able to work SFRPD to make recommendations on how to revise the plan. The Management Area concept grew out of these meetings.

June 2005 - *Initial Draft Plan was released for public review and workshops* - Three well attended public workshops were held throughout the city and outreach also included neighborhood groups and residents within 300 feet of all Natural Areas. An on-line survey was also available for individuals and members of the public that were unable to attend in person. Feedback from approximately 2,700 public comments and recommendations from three independent scientists were incorporated into the Final Draft Plan.

February 2006 - *Final Draft Plan released*

August 2006 - *Recreation and Park Commission adopts the Final Draft Plan* as the project to be considered under CEQA.

April 2009 - *Proposed Legislation for Sharp Park Management* - Supervisor Mirkarimi introduces legislation that requires SFRPD to develop and plan for restoring Sharp Park for the California Red-legged Frog and San Francisco Garter Snake and transferring Sharp Park or developing a joint management agreement with the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. In response to this, SFRPD begins to develop the Sharp Park Conceptual Restoration Alternative Report.

May 2009 - *Environmental Report Scoping Meetings Held* - Public scoping meetings held for the Environmental Review Process.

September 2009 - *Sharp Park Conceptual Restoration Alternatives Report Completed* - This report evaluates 18-hole, 9-hole and no golf alternatives.

December 2009 - *Science Round Table Group Convened to Review Alternatives* - A science round table is convened to review the Conceptual Alternatives Report for Sharp Park.

December 2009 - *Recreation and Park Commission adopts the recommendation of the General Manager to proceed with the Laguna Salada Resotration which is undergoing environmental review and preserve the 18-hole golf course at Sharp Park*

December 2009 - *Hearing and No Action Taken at The Board of Supervisors' Government, Audit & Oversight Committee* - The Board of Supervisors' Government, Audit & Oversight Committee holds a hearing to review the Sharp Park Alternatives Report; no action is taken by the Committee.

February 2011 - *Sharp Park Working Group* - A Sharp Park Working Group that was moderated by Amy Meyers and included SFRPD, GGNRA, City of Pacifica and San Mateo County, releases its findings to recommend the short term recovery of the species and a long-term plan to naturally manage this coastal area.

August 2011 - *Draft Environmental Impact Report on the Significant Natural Areas Recourses Management Plan is released for public comment*

NEXT STEPS:

Fall 2011:

August 31, 2011 - *Draft Environmental Impact Report publication and public comment period begins* - Public comments will be accepted from August 31, 2011 to 5:00 p.m. on October 17, 2011. Written comments should be addressed to Bill Wycko, Environmental Review Officer, San Francisco Planning Department, 1650 Mission Street, Suite 400, San Francisco, CA 94103.

September 21, 2011 - *Historic Preservation Commission Hearing*

October 6, 2011 - *Planning Commission Hearing* - Room 400, City Hall, 1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place, beginning at 1:30 p.m. or later. **Please call 558-6422 the week of the hearing for a recorded message giving a more specific time.**

October 17, 2011 - *Public comment period ends*

Spring 2012 - Fall 2012:

Comments and Responses document prepared

Any changes to Draft Environmental Impact Report completed

Planning Commission certifies the Final Environmental Impact Report

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

The Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR), prepared by the San Francisco Planning Department, is available for public review and comment on the Planning Department's Negative Declarations & EIRs webpage (<http://tinyurl.com/meacases>). CDs and paper copies are also available at the Planning Information Center (PIC) at 1660 Mission Street, 1st Floor. Referenced materials are available for review by appointment at the Planning Department's office at 1650 Mission Street, 4th Floor. (Call 575-9122)

Any questions about the **environmental review** of the proposed project should be directed to Jessica Range at 415-575-9018.