



## **FORWARD TOGETHER**

November 13–14, 2018

San Francisco

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#### ***Forward Together: A Culture-Nature Journey Towards More Effective Conservation in a Changing World***

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San Francisco, California

*This symposium was convened to share insights on how understanding culture-nature interlinkages on many landscapes and waterscapes can shape more effective and sustainable conservation.*

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*Forward Together: A Culture-Nature Journey Towards More Effective Conservation in a Changing World*  
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**A History of Successful Advocacy for the Golden Gate**

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When I came from New York City to San Francisco in 1955, I had never seen a place so beautiful. This compact city, sparkling between the ocean and the bay, was surrounded by broad tracts of open land, north and south of the Golden Gate, a strait between San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean spanned by the Golden Gate Bridge. In 1970, when I sought a community project to balance my psychiatrist husband's introspective outlook, I met people who wanted to create a national park on the Golden Gate. I was happy to become an advocate for what turned out to be the largest land use conversion in the Bay Area. It is now the 82,000-acre Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA).

This paper recounts many of the stories of the successful advocacy campaigns that saved the grandeur of the Golden Gate as a national park. Others had tried before 1970 to permanently protect the Golden Gate. When former Sierra Club president Dr. Edgar Wayburn and his neighbor, photographer Ansel Adams, tried to bring the lands at the Golden Gate to the attention of the National Park Service (NPS) in the 1960s, NPS representatives instead asked for their help with the authorization of Point Reyes National Seashore to the north. That campaign was successful in 1962.

***Keywords***

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## **A History of Successful Advocacy for the Golden Gate**

Projects for protecting landscapes and history are most successful when the political climate is favorable. The strait of the Golden Gate, spanned by the Golden Gate Bridge, was indeed recognized as an American icon. However, Wayburn and Adams' idea for protecting this national treasure languished until the political climate suddenly became extraordinarily favorable in 1970. At that time, the land on either side of the strait was rapidly losing its value as a military asset and seemed ripe for the development of new towns. However, permanent protection as a national park could only happen by an act of Congress. Those who wished to conserve this place could take advantage of the favorable climate if we were willing to work for our park. I said I'd help organize a campaign.

We had a hundred years of history in our favor. Mayors of San Francisco had been saving the city's landscape since the 1870s, most notably by the dedication of 1017-acre Golden Gate Park. It is the city's pride and joy, but don't confuse that local park with the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA)! There were also several city parks along the coast. Muir Woods National Monument had been donated to the national government in 1907. Mount Tamalpais State Park and Point Reyes were protected. When the GGNRA was designated, it joined park sites already on the map totaling some 200,000 acres of landscape, habitat and history.

The landscape resource around which this opportunity centered was the seven Army forts that had been guarding the Golden Gate, which were declared unnecessary for the defense of the United States in the late 1960s. Farsighted Secretary of the Interior Walter Hickel proposed these military lands and a dozen other sites across the country be repurposed as "National Parks for the people, where the people are, in the urban areas." For these national parks to come into being, there would have to be legislation, broadly supported by local people, that would also have to gain national support. (Only half the other proposals succeeded). The GGNRA has been the most successful of these parks because of the overwhelming support of our legislators and the public, locally, and then nationally. That support continued from the first legislation, to additional

legislation that enlarged the original 34,000 acres of 1972 to the 82,000 acres of 1996. The goals of the park have been met by private financial and volunteer support that has made possible full implementation of the GGNRA legislation's intent.

Creating the GGNRA was a bipartisan campaign. The legislation was written by firebrand Democratic congressman Phillip Burton whose district was next to the park, and was endorsed by Republican congressman William S. Mailliard— whose district included all of the original land. The project got much assistance from the Sierra Club, headquartered in San Francisco, that had developed many land- conserving strategies.

The first sentences of our park's legislation give the big picture of P.L. 92-589, the 589th law of the 92nd session of the U.S, Congress. They read, in part:

*That in order to preserve for public use and enjoyment certain areas of... California, 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, the [park] is hereby established....In carrying out the provisions of this Act, the Secretary [of the Interior] shall preserve the recreation area, as far as possible, in its natural setting, and protect it from development and uses which would destroy the scenic beauty and natural character of the area.*

**Here's a birds-eye view of our first campaign:**

To develop effective public support we organized People For a Golden Gate National Recreation Area (PFGGNRA). For greatest flexibility and to be able to take public positions quickly under constantly changing opportunities or threats, it was always an ad-hoc committee. However, it was relatively autocratic in structure. All messages disseminated in our name had to be approved. I was co- chairman, and Edgar Wayburn, much my senior, was chairman. Only we two were empowered to give that approval.

This was our first strategy: Those two titles are not grammatically compatible, but had a purpose. I was the person on the ground every day; Ed was practicing medicine. If I were presenting policy to a legislator or at a meeting, I could speak with authority. But if I were unsure of the answer to a question, I could say, “I’ll get back to you— have to talk that over with the chairman.”

Another strategy was that we could discuss and change a position internally, but made sure there was no public conflict among participants in the campaign. Any appearance of internal conflict would provide an opening for opponents to weaken our proposal.

To inspire support, we put everything in our plan that we wanted. We painted a big picture, while making sure all the parts of the plan connected logically, geographically, and economically. We did not start out with the idea of “Well only this much could be successful.” We backed our dreams with hard facts to stay within the constraints of reality. If opposition forces tried to whittle down the plan, we had room to negotiate and, if necessary, compromise.

Some of the land to be included in the GGNRA was easy to comprehend. The unneeded Army forts and the city’s coastal parks that San Francisco couldn’t care for were understandable. But how about the Presidio, a 1500-acre active Army post? That problem was solved by Congressman Burton, who put the whole Presidio into his boundary map for the park —and language into the legislation stating that whenever Presidio land was not needed by the Army, it would come under NPS jurisdiction.

It should be noted that Burton’s strategy of including the Presidio also became an exception to open discussion of the plan. We said little about inclusion of the Presidio because the 200-year-old Army post was popular with local residents and military retirees. Few knew that its closure had been contemplated for years. We showed the Presidio on our maps within the shoreline of the city without labeling it. When the *San Francisco Examiner* figured it out, the newspaper printed a nasty editorial and cartoon. Fortunately, we’d done enough work to promote the national park so the paper only railed against inclusion of the Presidio, not other military

properties. We didn't argue about it, for example with a letter to the editor, and the issue faded away.

The name of the game was inclusiveness. It was necessary to inform as many people in the communities surrounding our proposed park as possible, from the patricians to the labor unions. We demonstrated awareness of racial, cultural and economic diversity because the park would welcome everyone. Young lawyers of the San Francisco Barristers Club helped draft legislative language. We showed off our maps at public meetings. Organizations who wanted lunchtime speakers invited us to join them. Over 65 organizations endorsed the park proposal after we took them on Sierra Club hikes or met with them. We took a lesson from the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department, a city agency: When the Department wants voters to approve a bond issue for capital expenditures, it makes sure the money will provide park improvements all over the city. People who see benefit to themselves, their neighborhood or their environmental and recreational interests will support park projects. Everyone could see they would benefit from the GGNRA.

**Here's the up-close mouse-eye view of our campaigns:**

We were scrupulous about our facts, especially when dealing with legislators and the media. If they used what we told them at their next public presentation and it turned out to contain inaccuracies, we knew they would not want to listen to us again.

When we wrote to an agency or a legislator about our project, we made sure we included everything the recipient needed to know about it the first time we wrote because it might be the only time we contacted them. I learned to sleep on my message or tried to get a second set of eyes or ears to review major communications. I knew I would not get a second chance to give those busy people a follow up of, "I left something out."

To save the landscapes, we needed maps. Our detailed maps showed legislators and agencies what would be protected in the park. The NPS uses U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) maps to

show parcels included in a park. Bob Young, a Marin County college student, told us he knew how to transfer the parcels shown on the maps of the county assessor's office to USGS maps. He also drew up a list of "justifications" for the inclusion of each parcel. Our USGS maps gave each parcel a simple number, such as 40, 41, 42. They were listed in that order in the justifications, followed by the unmemorable complex assessor's parcel number, the name(s) of the owner(s), acreage, any improvements such as houses or barns, and the assessed value which would show about 25% of the cost to buy the parcel. There was also a phrase of justification for including the parcel in the park such as "outstanding views," "access to other parcels" and sometimes "connecting parcel #42 to #47."

We capitalized on incredible opportunities! In 1971, John Jacobs, executive director of the civic organization SPUR (San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association), asked me to rush to a downtown meeting with an advertising agency that had joined a contest. A dozen public service advertisements would be chosen for publication—free of charge—in the regional editions of *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines. We presented our project and were one of the winners. "For 6 Cents You Could Give This to Your Kids," was the headline of an advertisement with photos and a mail-in coupon (6 cents postage). Sierra Club's magazine reprinted the ad and took our campaign nationwide. Then the west coast magazine *Sunset* reprinted it. We got 2,000 coupons, badly-needed checks, and people wrote to legislators across the country.

For two years, our legislation was promoted locally, then nationally. After congressional hearings, the House of Representatives and Senate voted on the bill. It passed both houses of Congress unanimously and was signed into law by President Richard Nixon on October 27, 1972.

**After our successful campaign to authorize the park came implementation of the legislation. Advocacy for implementation has had two aspects:**

- A) Meeting changing expectations for financing parks.
- B) Engaging stakeholders who help protect the intent of the park's legislation to volunteer to protect park resources and aid in presenting park programs.

Since prices escalate when land is included in a park, we asked our congressmen, the Nature Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land, to find money to quickly buy some of the private land. Their efforts were successful.

In 1972, people had begun to doubt whether national, state and local government agencies could care for their parks without large infusions of private money. There were park cooperating associations but they did not earn enough to help fund cyclical maintenance or capital requirements. Bill Whalen, our first GGNRA superintendent, saw that the usual souvenir, book and map stores could not help significantly with conversion of former military and ranch landscapes and their structures to park uses. Whalen recruited Greg Moore to start the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy. That organization became a major park advocate through its financial contributions and its programs. During Moore's tenure as President and CEO, the Parks Conservancy has raised over \$500 million to support the park's plans, projects, trails, visitor centers, education programs and outreach brochures that the GGNRA might otherwise never fund or else accomplish after too-long delays. The Conservancy has done this through a broad approach to a generous philanthropic community. It gets foundation and corporate grants. At the 2017 annual Trails Forever dinner, 460 guests raised \$1.64 million in dinner ticket and auction sales. By selling some of its posters, cards and clothing outside its own retail outlets (in museum stores and such) it further publicizes the park. The \$90 million Tunnel Tops project will add 14 acres of parklands to the Presidio, above the roadway to the Golden Gate Bridge that used to bisect the park. The Conservancy has raised \$80 million so far for that project.



The Conservancy's robust stewardship program helps with the mission of building community. It connects GGNRA volunteers with the projects and jobs that most need doing, by organizing them and providing leadership. Last year, over 27,000 individuals volunteered in our parklands, contributing hundreds of thousands of hours of service. That represents roughly 10% of total volunteer hours in all of America's national parks. If they'd monetized the hours, they probably would have been worth well over a million dollars. These volunteers grow plants in native plant nurseries to sustain healthy habitats, restore worn trails, track raptors from Hawk Hill as community scientists, release Coho salmon into Redwood Creek, lead visitors through the Alcatraz historic gardens, and catalogue wildlife photos. However, the Conservancy does not modernize utility systems or fund seismic stabilization which are government responsibilities.

### **The Presidio**

In 1994, after Congress moved to close 86 military sites, the San Francisco Presidio, no longer a productive Army post, was transferred to the NPS. By this time, Congressman Burton had died and some members of Congress moved to sell the Presidio. In 1996, Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi won a hard-fought campaign, fueled by wholehearted support from both the public and Members who had known Burton, in order to prevent Congress from repealing any part of his protective legislation.

Management of the central 80% of the Presidio came under the jurisdiction of the Presidio Trust. Creating the legislative authority for the Presidio Trust took four long years—two sessions of Congress. The effort required sophisticated national, not just local, advocacy. The Presidio was a National Historic Landmark (NHL), giving it the highest level of nationally-recognized historic protection under the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties. People were determined not to sell an NHL! In 1994, the NPS had developed a plan to protect the Presidio's natural and historic assets. They proposed utilizing the buildings and grounds for wonderful tenants and programs. But when legislation for this plan reached Congress, an inevitable question arose: who was going to pay for this conversion and reuse? The

appropriations that would be needed would take money from every other national park. The legislation stalled.

A bill proposing a new strategy to preserve the Presidio was introduced in 1995 and passed Congress in 1996. The bill created the Presidio Trust under the direction of a governing board of seven trustees charged with management of an independent federally-chartered corporation that was given the deadline of fifteen years to make the Presidio self-sufficient—or else the Presidio would be sold.

The road to the successful legislation was bumpy and took much advocacy to succeed. The Trust was an unfamiliar concept, suspiciously disliked by many. I chaired monthly meetings of “People for the Presidio,” where concerned park advocates met with NPS leaders and congressional aides. They gave the “People” up-to-date accurate information so scurrilous stories would not take root in organizations or the media.

Then, at the request of GGNRA superintendent Brian O’Neill, Toby Rosenblatt, chairman of the Parks Conservancy, called for a national advocacy campaign to preserve the Presidio. Rosenblatt recruited Jim Harvey, head of Transamerica Corporation and much respected in the business and environmental communities, to chair the Presidio Council. With influential members drawn from across the country, the Council lobbied for successful passage of the 1996 legislation.

The Trust’s structure of a public-private partnership was necessary for the Presidio to succeed as part of the GGNRA. The 1500-acre Presidio had deteriorated infrastructure, six million square feet of built space, and acres of landscape designed for military use. Most of it had to be repurposed, within the constraints of its status as a NHL. Today, much has been accomplished. There are now 1,311 residential homes and apartments in the Presidio. There are 130 commercial rental spaces that include lodging, restaurants, and retail sales. The NPS kept jurisdiction over 20% of land on the Presidio’s coast where there are few buildings.

After much public scrutiny, the Presidio Trust Management Plan was adopted by the Presidio Trust board with public concurrence in 2002. Three of its tenets were that the built up space of the Presidio would diminish a little rather than increase, that old buildings would be renovated and repurposed before seeking to build new ones, and that the scale of new buildings would be similar to those now on the Presidio.

These tenets were based on the GGNRA and Trust's legislation and on public support for the Presidio's preservation. So when two wealthy men each proposed to build a large modern museum, Presidio activists fought to protect the park's landscape and its inherent recreational and educational values. Neither museum could fit into a historic building. The Fisher museum, on the Main Parade, would have displayed a major modern art collection, but the building design did not meet historic preservation criteria. After two years of public protest at meetings and in the media, proponents met with a Department of the Interior attorney. I was told she said if they persisted, they would spend the next five years in court. The collection is now housed in San Francisco's Museum of Modern Art.

Shortly after that, filmmaker George Lucas proposed another museum for the Presidio's northern waterfront. Regional politicians and businessmen supported the idea. But the museum's architecture did not meet the Trust's design criteria for the area. John King, urban design critic of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, excoriated the building design. At the Presidio Trust's public hearing, opponents asked the board to reject a building that would diminish the value of the Golden Gate. The board unanimously rejected the museum, and it is being built in Los Angeles. Trust programming now focuses on history, architecture and landscape.

The Trust recognizes that visitors to the Presidio will have questions about what they see or experience. Most staff members wear an identification pin that suggests they may be able to answer questions. The Trust has trained a cadre of volunteers such as docents to support Presidio programs. In 2017, 5,382 volunteers gave 21,336 hours of service for hands-on stewardship and

164 people gave 4,994 hours of service as public-facing docents, ambassadors, and special event support. They have many opportunities to advocate for the Trust and park.

**In conclusion:**

To preserve a large cultural landscape you must advocate adeptly, using a wide variety of strategies and techniques. In support of a national park, foresighted people recognized the Golden Gate could be diminished by development. Advocates created a strong, responsive organization, made comprehensive plans and maps, were scrupulous about facts, included volunteers from every walk of life, and recognized changes in national park financing. These supporters helped lead the GGNRA and Trust campaigns from local to national endorsement.

For 48 years, this national park has gained support from the advocacy of determined organizations, individuals and government officials who love this landscape, support its preservation and work tirelessly to ensure that it will be saved for public use in perpetuity.

**Biographical Notes**

Amy Meyer is a conservation activist, a leading advocate for national parks and a mentor for other activists. Her book, “New Guardians for the Golden Gate,” chronicles how inspired citizens and conservation and civic organizations collaborated with legislators to protect the natural, scenic, historic, and recreational sites of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.