

CONNECTING HUMAN AND NATURAL COMMUNITIES IN OUR CITIES

Strategies to Engage People in Parks, Natural Areas, and Stewardship

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The future of parks, nature and biodiversity in our cities depends upon an informed, engaged, and committed citizenry. Unless we connect people to nature, protected areas to one another, protected areas to lands and communities around them, our urban protected areas will be fragmented in their management and constituency. With the threats facing the natural areas at our cities' doorsteps and the role of urban protected areas in maintaining a constituency for conservation, effective strategies to engage the urban population have never been more necessary.

The Golden Gate National Parks is one of the world's largest urban protected areas. It includes land and water managed by multiple jurisdictions encompassing about 80,000 acres (32,375 hectares). It is visited by nearly 20 million people a year. It is contained within the larger UNESCO MAB Golden Gate Biosphere Reserve. In total, over 5 million acres (2,023,428 hectares) of protected land and water has been set aside in the San Francisco Bay Area, with the Golden Gate National Parks as a centerpiece.

But connecting human and natural communities in our cities entails ongoing strategies, programs of public engagement and long-term commitment. More and more, the 21st century park manager is not just a caretaker of nature, but a caretaker of communities. The manager must work beyond the boundaries of protected areas to succeed in their conservation mission. Park and protected area managers will need to become adept at engaging increasing niche-related customers, constituencies, friends and partners.

My presentation, "Connecting Human and Natural Communities in our Cities" will focus on 25 years of progress in the Golden Gate National Parks. It will include:

- **Build Awareness: *How to effectively build public awareness and engagement through marketing, branding, and media:*** Our case study shows great progress in using survey, marketing, marketing and outreach methods to build knowledge and awareness. This is critical to reaching a metropolitan area of 6 million people and building their interest, knowledge and support of nature and biodiversity.

- **Invite Participation: *How to reach out to urban audiences and invite their participation in the conservation of nature:*** An outreach, networking and partnership approach is critical in engaging urban audiences. People’s needs for education, enjoyment, civic engagement, and employment are all part of the equation as opportunities for participation are developed.
- **Create Stewardship: *How to link public appreciation into active stewardship and care of the protected area:*** Our stewardship volunteer programs bring over 20,000 volunteers per year actively caring for and interpreting the Golden Gate National Parks. These volunteers manage native plant nurseries (which have installed over 1 million native plants grown from seeds collected in park watersheds); restore natural habitats (over 50 active sites per year); and monitor wildlife.
- **Expand Diversity: *How to engage youth and diverse communities as future stakeholders for protected areas:*** The cities of our world are more diverse than ever – in the age, race, cultural background, and economic levels of their population. Making nature inviting, relevant and accessible to urban populations is increasingly challenging, but critical for the long-term care of these places. Our youth outreach programs reach young people of all backgrounds introducing new audiences to be “bold leaders for thriving parks, healthy communities and a more environmentally just society.”

Combined, these programs strategies show a comprehensive set of “**Strategies for Sustainably Managing Protected Areas in Urban and Peri-urban Environments.**”

The Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy is one of the largest nonprofit groups in the United States supporting an urban protected area and national park. Over its 25 years history, the Conservancy has delivered over \$190 million in support to park projects and programs, enlisted thousands of volunteers in stewardship programs, restored thousands of acres of natural habitat and served tens of thousands of school children and youth.



Youth Stewardship Volunteers in the Golden Gate National Parks