



*Big Rec*

# Recreation

## Recreation Facilities

There has always been demand for active and structured recreation throughout the park's history. One hundred years ago people were coming to Golden Gate Park for relaxation, walking, bicycling, picnicking, boating, enjoying the horticultural displays and concerts, and playing baseball, tennis and other sports. Over the years new activities and facilities were added such as horseshoes, playgrounds, lawn bowling greens, model yacht club, soccer fields, fly casting pools, and Kezar Stadium. The addition of many facilities has resulted in an increase of park land dedicated to exclusive uses rather than to flexible, unprogrammed park land available for less structured park activities. The recreation facilities also require a higher level of maintenance and investment. The demands for recreation need to be balanced with the objectives of preserving the original intent and purpose of the park as a "sylvan and pastoral" retreat. Emphasis should be placed on improving and maintaining existing recreation facilities, rather than adding new ones.

### Athletic Fields

There are large athletic fields at Kezar Stadium, Big Rec, the Polo Field, and the Beach Chalet soccer fields. There are other facilities such as the softball diamonds at Sharon Meadow (Little Rec) and Speedway Meadow, the golf course, the archery field, and the bowling greens. There are problems with overuse of some fields at the Polo Field and the Beach Chalet soccer fields. The lack of drainage systems under some fields makes maintenance difficult after rains. The turf is often damaged when fields are wet. The

demand for these fields is very high and fields are receiving heavy use. Regular maintenance is not always scheduled into field permit schedules.

- Upgrade irrigation systems
- Install drainage systems where needed
- Scheduled maintenance periods should be added to field permit schedules
- Where feasible, rotate and shift field locations
- Enforce field closures after rains and when required to provide maintenance
- One additional soccer field is recommended at the Richmond Sunset treatment plant site (implementation of an additional field should be contingent on sufficient staff to maintain it)
- Maintain an operations policy for the Polo Field to guide decisions concerning its use.

### Children's Play Areas

There are currently five children's play areas in the park: 46th Avenue/Lincoln Way, Mothers' Meadow (M.L. King Drive/Crossover Drive), 9th Avenue/Fulton Street, the Mary B. Connolly Children's Playground, and at the Panhandle at Ashbury Street. They include wood and steel play structures in sand surfaces. The Mary B. Connolly Children's Playground is the largest and includes a zone that is accessible for all children and parents.

Design of safe playgrounds is regulated in California by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) Handbook for Public Playground Safety. The CPSC guidelines are regularly revised and are now under review (revised guidelines are expected in 1999). The CPSC guidelines cover safety issues such as distances between

equipment (safety zones), separation of age group equipment (preschool versus school age children), height of fall and surfacing, head entrapment (size of openings), and elimination of protrusions. Compliance with the CPSC Guidelines must be met by the year 2000.

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and the California State Building Code (Title 24, Disabled Access Regulations) provide guidelines for accessibility. Path of travel to and within play areas, and integration of accessible and nonaccessible elements are covered by the guidelines.

Play areas will need to be rebuilt to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Title 24, and the Consumer Product Safety Commission Guidelines.

### **Tennis Courts**

The tennis courts have occupied the same site since 1894. The complex has been expanded over the years and now consists of 21 courts, serving almost 100,000 players annually. Although a fee is now charged to use the courts, the revenue collected does not cover the expenses to maintain the complex. Night lighting is under consideration to extend playing hours to better serve users and to generate greater revenue.

### **Equestrian Facilities**

The existing equestrian center dates from 1938. The facility is run by a concessionaire and offers riding instruction, trail rides, and boarding of

horses. There are 75 stalls, about half of which are available to boarders. A proposal to cover the central arena and replace temporary structures with permanent facilities (with a possible increase of 1,000 square feet) is currently under consideration. A covered ring would extend the usable hours, better serving users and raising additional revenue. The Equestrian Center is in need of general reconstruction to remedy code violations and seismic upgrade. The bleachers and judges stand at the Bercut Equitation Field are in disrepair and need reconstruction. An additional training area is available at the east end of Little Speedway Meadow.

### **Trails and Paths**

There are numerous paved and unpaved trails and paths throughout the park, including several service roads. They are essential for walking, running, bicycling and horseback riding; activities that are increasing in popularity. Paved paths are also a key component of pedestrian circulation and accessibility. The interior trails offer opportunities to escape from traffic and provide access to the most quiet parts of the park. There are designated bridle trails and a bike path. There are numerous unpaved trails, some of which are “volunteer” or “social” trails that were not planned. The sandy soil is erosion prone when vegetation is trampled and removed. Trail users should be encouraged to remain on designated trails through signs and other means.

- Maintenance of paths and trails is not done on any regular schedule or basis. Path and trail maintenance should be made a part of gardeners’ regular tasks, or a special trail

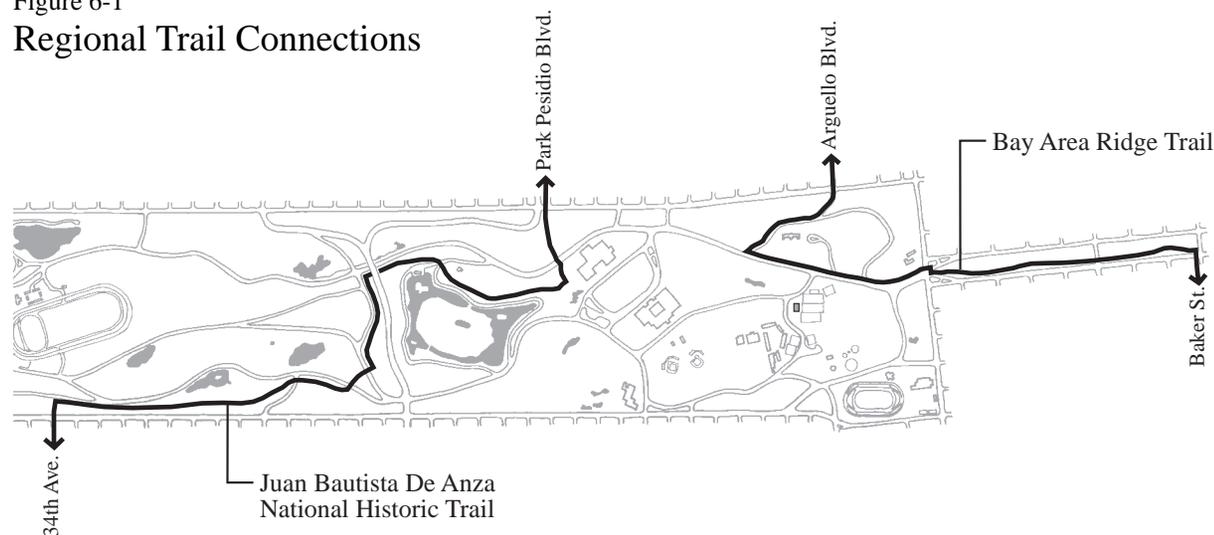
crew should be established.

- Trails and paths that are used by maintenance vehicles should be of sufficient width and structural strength to support vehicles without sustaining damage.
- Many asphalt paths need repaving. Paths that are designated for multiple-use (including bicycles) should be widened to minimize user conflicts.
- Heavily used unpaved trails need crushed rock bases to be maintained and support service vehicle access.
- “Volunteer” or “social” trails need to be eliminated where not necessary. These trails are responsible for serious erosion problems around the park. Trails should be removed and revegetated. Temporary fencing, barriers, and signs explaining erosion problems should be installed to discourage use.
- Trail etiquette should be promoted.
- Maps showing designated trails should be displayed at all park entries.

### **Regional Trail Connections**

Two regional trails, the Bay Area Ridge Trail and the Juan Bautista De Anza National Historic Trail, are proposed to pass through Golden Gate Park. The Bay Area Ridge Trail is a 400-mile trail system that travels the ridges around San Francisco Bay and links many parks and open spaces. The De Anza Trail is a National Historic Trail that represents the route taken by Juan Bautista De Anza in 1775-76 from what is now Mexico across deserts and mountains to found a colony for Spain in San Francisco. The route in

Figure 6-1  
Regional Trail Connections



Golden Gate Park for the De Anza Trail is part of a connection between Lake Merced and Mountain Lake Park. The designated route for both trails will follow existing trails and paths within Golden Gate Park. Signs directing trail users will be kept to a minimum.

### Mountain Bikes on Trails

A planning process involving bicyclists, equestrian, other trail users, and park maintenance staff is being undertaken to study the feasibility of permitting mountain bikes on park trails. Mountain bike use in the park has grown in recent years, but currently there is no policy and there are no designated trails, which has led to indiscriminate use of mountain bikes around the park. Uncontrolled mountain bike use has caused damage in many areas around the park, including

erosion, soil compaction, and plant damage. Under consideration is the premise that by permitting controlled use, and by educating park users about damage caused by bicycling off of designated trails, the indiscriminate use and damage can be reduced. Trail safety and user conflicts are also being discussed with the goal of finding solutions. Permitting mountain bikes is contingent on several conditions:

- suitable trails can be agreed upon west of Crossover Drive
- the planning process includes participation by maintenance staff, equestrians, and other users
- the trails be maintainable to minimize erosion problems
- a bicycle group volunteers to assist with maintenance of trails, signs, and educational and enforcement programs

- an aggressive program is begun to minimize damage by mountain bike misuse through education, enforcement, and installation of signs, barriers, and landscaping
- the trail use is to be monitored and the policy reviewed.

### Other Recreation Facilities

There are numerous other recreation facilities in the park. The conditions of these vary considerably. The facilities that are most in demand generally have better maintenance. In some cases there are clubs or concessions that assist with maintenance. Following are brief summaries of their existing conditions and needs.

- Archery Field: Targets need repair and new stands.
- Golf Course: Golf course is generally in good condition. The irrigation system was upgraded with funds from the 1992 Golden Gate Park Infrastructure Bond.
- Handball Courts: Walls need patching and painting, roof needs repair.
- Lawn Bowling Greens: Asphalt surfaces around greens need repair. Maintaining greens is highly labor intensive.
- Horseshoes: Needs general renovation, often vandalized due to secluded location, not accessible. A relocation of the horseshoe pits to a site near the dog training area and petanque court should be considered.
- Petanque Field: Maintained by users.
- Fly Casting Pools: Need periodic draining and cleaning.
- Maintain the bicycle track around the Polo Field.

## Special Events and Permits

Golden Gate Park hosts many special events during the year, including concerts, festivals, races, and bike rides. Events in the park are governed by the City Charter and the Recreation and Park Commission Permit and Reservation Policy. They must be recreational in nature and event sponsors must meet the requirements of the permit policy (which is reviewed by the Commission periodically).

Some events have raised questions as to their appropriateness and impacts on the park. Large events are required to pay fees and post a performance bond to cover costs and damages, although the true costs may exceed those collected. The limited maintenance staff are removed from regular duties to perform repairs, and regular maintenance suffers.

The location of some events has been questioned. The carrying capacity of areas should be further studied, and the permit policy refined to reflect findings. Turf areas and athletic fields suffer from compaction and other damage. Some events that formerly took place in the Music Concourse, which was designed for events and has a tough surface, have been moved to Sharon Meadow. Other events fence off areas to charge admission, and require up to a week for preparation and take down, denying park visitors use of those areas.

Most of the events are fund-raisers for various nonprofit organizations, but they are highly profitable for event promoters. Consideration should be given to giving priority to events that benefit Golden Gate Park, and to increasing fees to further supplement the park's funding.

## Recommendations

- All events should meet a standard of appropriateness as outlined in the Objectives and Policies and the City Charter. Consider directing some events to other sites within San Francisco.
- Carefully assess impacts and costs of events. Ensure that fees cover true costs of events and allow for overtime pay for maintenance staff to perform repairs so regular maintenance does not suffer. Raise fees for special events to realize a profit for the Department.
- Assess carrying capacity of permit areas based on surface characteristics and other factors.
- Continue to review (every six months) and revise the Permit and Reservations Policy to minimize impacts of events and to maximize fees to benefit the park. Regular policy review provides an opportunity for public involvement.
- Consider alternatives to fenced events that charge admission.