

RENEWING MOUNTAIN LAKE



A Summary of the Mountain Lake Enhancement Plan



September 2000



Mountain Lake 1899

Mountain Lake's waters have been treasured for centuries. Native people probably used the lake as a source of fresh water. In 1776, Captain Juan Bautista de Anza and his scouting party camped nearby on one of the earliest Spanish expeditions to the peninsula of San Francisco.

Although Mountain Lake remains beautiful, the lake is in peril. Years of human impact, sedimentation and the spread of invasive exotic trees and weeds are rapidly degrading the lake's water and surrounding habitat.

Now, through the efforts of the Presidio Trust, Golden Gate National Parks Association, National Park Service and community members, a plan to enhance this natural gem is being developed.

NATURE AND BEAUTY IN THE PRESIDIO



Mountain Lake is one of the few remaining natural lakes in San Francisco and one of the Golden Gate National Parks' most unique natural resources. Nestled on the southern edge of the Presidio and bordered by the city-owned Mountain Lake Park, it is a popular destination for residents and visitors, and provides habitat for many species of birds.

However, over the last two hundred years, Mountain Lake has become shallow and its water quality has deteriorated due to sedimentation, nutrient-rich runoff and nearby road construction. Once 30 feet deep, Mountain Lake has filled to a murky depth of less than 10 feet.

Blue gum eucalyptus, other non-native trees and weeds have invaded native plant communities and spread to the water's edge—contributing to the lake's poor water clarity, increasing nutrient loads, and reducing wildlife habitats. Degraded access ways and the lack of benches and other facilities hamper visitor enjoyment of the site.

Unless its present condition is altered, algal blooms will flourish and native plants and wildlife will disappear from the area, diminishing Mountain Lake's health and beauty.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

Planning for Mountain Lake's future began as a grassroots effort in 1995. Since then, the Presidio Trust, National Park Service and Golden Gate National Parks Association have sponsored a public planning process involving community forums, site research and other technical analysis, to produce a roadmap for how to improve the health of the lake.

Based on the results of this planning effort, these three organizations have jointly prepared the *Mountain Lake Enhancement Plan and Environmental Assessment*. Now available for public review, this document proposes a range of options for improving the lake and its shoreline. Funding for planning and implementing the first phase of enhancement comes from \$500,000 in mitigation funds secured in 1998 from the San Francisco International Airport.



THE MOUNTAIN LAKE ENHANCEMENT PLAN

The Mountain Lake planning effort has three goals: 1) to improve water quality; 2) to enhance habitat; and 3) to improve public access. The *Mountain Lake Enhancement Plan and Environmental Assessment* presents and analyzes a project action and three alternatives, including a "no action" alternative. As detailed in the planning document, each project alternative is composed of a different combination and/or timing of these elements:

- Dredging of the lake to remove accumulated sediment and deepen the lake
- Replacement of exotic trees with natives
- Replacement of weeds with native plants
- Buffer planting of trees and shrubs along Park Presidio Boulevard
- Visitor access improvements
- Removal of culvert and installation of a bridge

THE PROPOSED ACTION

Based on technical analysis and public comment, project planners recommend the following actions for enhancing Mountain Lake. The project elements described below would be implemented in phases, with work to begin in 2001.

PHASE I

Dredging to Remove Sediment. Remove sediment to deepen the lake by about 4 feet.

Establish Native Woodland. Replace eucalyptus and other exotic trees and weeds along the east shore with native willow and oak woodland.

Exotic Weed Management. Remove 0.7 acres of Cape ivy in the existing willow woodland.

Planting along Park Presidio Boulevard. Plant native trees and shrubs between Mountain Lake and Park Presidio Boulevard to buffer the lake from the roadway.

Visitor Access Improvements. Construct a 350-foot unpaved trail with three overlooks along the east shore of the lake and an overlook with benches and interpretive exhibits on the lake's south shore.

FUTURE PHASES

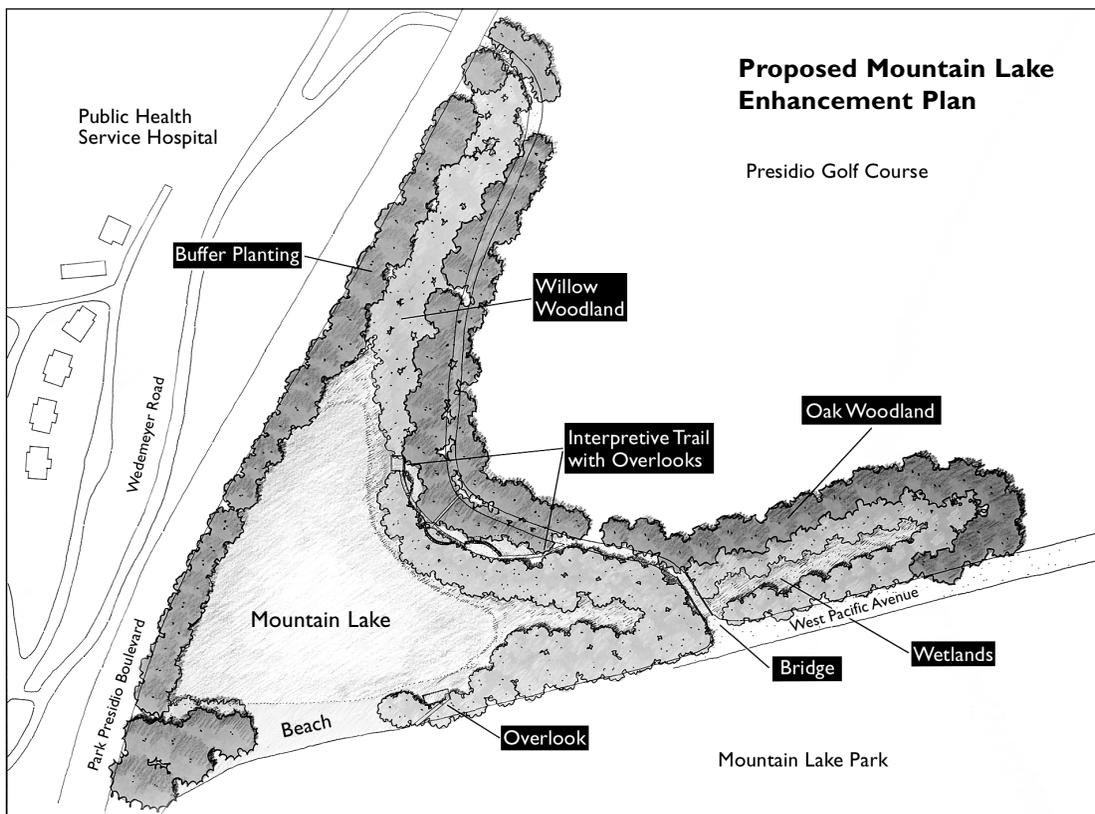
These activities would be initiated three to five years after completion of Phase I.

Native Woodland Expansion. Replace four large eucalyptus trees along the east shore of the lake, trees along the north end of Park Presidio Boulevard and trees east of the culvert with a native woodland.

Additional Exotic Weed Management. Remove 2.5 acres of weeds in existing habitat and 1.8 acres of weeds east of the culvert and revegetate with native woodland and wetland species.

Culvert Removal and Bridge Installation.

Remove the culvert, the paved road over the culvert and the fill that supports the road in order to tie the eastern end of the lake to adjacent wetlands area. Replace the existing road with a bridge.



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The visual impact of tree replacement is an important issue for park planners, neighbors and visitors. As a result, a series of computerized simulations was prepared to show how views of Mountain Lake might change over time.



Existing



20 years

The public expressed interest in buffering Mountain Lake from Park Presidio. The plan proposes a dense native woodland to block views of passing cars. These simulations show the west side of the lake today and after 20 years of tree growth.



Existing



1 year



5 years



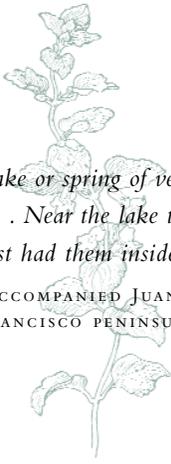
20 years

Eucalyptus leaves, branches and bark that fall into the lake degrade the quality of its water. The simulations above show a phased approach to removing exotic trees along the east shore and planting a native woodland. The images show the site today, immediately after the first phase of tree removal, after five years and after 20 years.

HELP PLAN MOUNTAIN LAKE'S FUTURE

You are encouraged to comment on the proposed action and alternatives for Mountain Lake. To receive a copy of the *Mountain Lake Enhancement Plan and Environmental Assessment*, contact Dawn Torres, Presidio Trust, 34 Graham Street, PO Box 29052, San Francisco, CA 94129, 415.561.5300; mountainlake@presidiotrust.gov.

The plan, information on the process and opportunities for community involvement and the schedule for public comment are posted on the Presidio Trust's website, at <http://www.presidiotrust.gov>. Comments on the plan should be sent to John Pelka, NEPA Compliance Coordinator for the Presidio Trust, at the mailing or email address listed above.



We halted on the banks of a lake or spring of very fine water near the mouth of the port of San Francisco. . . . Near the lake there were so many yerba buena and so many lilies that I almost had them inside my tent.

—PADRE PEDRO FONT, WHO ACCOMPANIED JUAN BAUTISTA DE ANZA ON HIS EXPEDITION TO THE SAN FRANCISCO PENINSULA IN 1776



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