

SOUTH HILLS DISTRICT: OUTDOOR RECREATION AND WOODLAND RETREAT

PLANNING CONCEPT

The South Hills district will provide a serene, park-like setting. The amount of open space will be increased with the removal of Wherry Housing complex (Baker Beach Apartments) over time, and the quality of park resources and visitor experiences will be improved. Remnant natural systems, including Mountain Lake, serpentine grasslands, and other ecosystems, will be preserved, expanded, and restored. The historic Presidio forest will be rehabilitated, native plant communities and wildlife corridors enhanced, and the stately San Francisco National Cemetery maintained. Most of the East and West Washington Boulevard housing, as well as existing recreational amenities, will remain.

Character, Land Use, and Open Space

The South Hills district covers over 50 percent of Area B, extending across the park's highest elevations from the Presidio Gate to the east to the World War II Memorial overlooking the Pacific Ocean to the west. The district is made up of several distinctive landscapes covering the southern half of the Presidio, including the 100-year old Presidio forest, Mountain Lake, the 160-acre Presidio Golf Course, the popular Julius Kahn Playground, and the 33-acre historic San Francisco National Cemetery, managed by the Veterans Administration.

(See Figure 3.8.)

Vestiges of San Francisco's natural heritage are best seen in this part of the Presidio. Remnant native habitats have survived the dramatic landscape transformations of the last two centuries. Diverse habitats, including majestic oak woodlands, forest canopies, and open grassy knolls, sustain native bird species found nowhere else in San Francisco. The district also harbors rare and endangered plant species, including the endangered San Francisco lessingia, found in only two places on earth, and the last remaining wild Raven's manzanita in the world.



THE DIVERSE SOUTH HILLS DISTRICT SUPPORTS THE HISTORIC PRESIDIO FOREST, WILDLIFE AND NATIVE PLANT COMMUNITIES, AND RESIDENTIAL AND RECREATIONAL USES

The district contains three isolated non-historic housing complexes set in sparsely vegetated portions of the Presidio forest. They consist of two large neighborhoods along Washington Boulevard, and the Wherry Housing complex (Baker Beach Apartments). Together, these residential areas contain 587 dwelling units.

Activities in the South Hills district will revolve around natural resource restoration, preservation, and interpretation. The removal of non-historic housing at the Wherry Housing site (Baker Beach Apartments) over the next 30 years will expand the Presidio's open space resources. Removal of this

non-historic housing and associated pavement will allow for expansion of natural resource areas and contiguous open space. At the remaining East and West Washington sites, the Trust will consider dividing existing large housing units into smaller units to help expand the range of housing choices available at the Presidio. To enhance the park and residential setting, the Trust will improve the landscape to complement the surrounding natural environs and will consider bike lanes and traffic-calming features along Washington Boulevard.



FIGURE 3.8
SOUTH HILLS - OUTDOOR RECREATION AND WOODLAND RETREAT

- Remove non-historic Wherry Housing complex (Baker Beach Apartments) to restore native plant habitat and expand and enhance open space.
- Retain most of the East and West Washington Boulevard housing, and enhance the livability of the area and the natural landscape.
- Restore the health of Mountain Lake.
- Retain and enhance recreational amenities in the district, including Rob Hill Campground.
- Rehabilitate historic forest and native plant communities.
- Establish a comprehensive system of paths and trails.

Resource conservation will ensure that Lobos Creek remains a rich ecological system that can continue to provide the Presidio with drinking water. The Presidio Trust will continue to operate the water treatment plant. Mountain Lake will be enhanced and native habitat restored according to the approved *Mountain Lake Enhancement Plan* (2000). The historic ridgetop forest will be rehabilitated as set forth in the *Vegetation Management Plan* (VMP).

Visitors to this area of the park will be able to experience and understand the district's resources through education and recreation opportunities, enjoy spectacular views of the ocean and bay, hike through restored natural areas and forests, play golf, or just enjoy a quiet moment. Recreational facilities such as the recently renovated Presidio Golf Course, Julius Kahn Playground, and Rob Hill Campground will be retained for public use. Hands-on habitat restoration programs will engage the public in growing, outplanting, and weeding natural habitats, an increasingly popular recreational activity that greatly contributes to the Presidio's ecological sustainability. Natural history inventory, monitoring, and research programs will involve local universities and scientific institutions. Such programs are underway at Mountain Lake. The San Francisco National Cemetery's forested setting, expansive site, commanding views, and historic gravestones, buildings, and roads will be preserved and managed by the Veterans Administration.

Access and Circulation

The Arguello Gate, 25th Avenue Gate, and Lincoln Boulevard will continue to provide access to the South Hills. Washington and Park Boulevards will remain in place with enhancements for bicyclists and pedestrians. Battery Caulfield Road/Wedemeyer Street will be maintained as a narrow, slow street providing access from the South Hills to the Public Health Service Hospital district.

In the course of demolishing the Wherry Housing complex (Baker Beach Apartments), most roads in the complex will be removed or converted into pedestrian trails. West Pacific Avenue between the golf course and the Public Health Service Hospital district will remain closed to vehicles and will provide pedestrian and bicycle access to Mountain Lake. Washington Boulevard will be used as a scenic bicycle and pedestrian route following the natural ridgeline within the historic Presidio forest, and linking hiking trails through natural areas to Rob Hill Campground, overlooks, and other areas.

Hiking trails will connect the South Hills with other parts of the Presidio. An extensive trail system will be developed as set forth in the Presidio Trails and Bikeways Master Plan. Trails will lead to overlooks, wind through natural and other areas of the park, and provide connections for the Bay Area Ridge Trail and other regional and national trails. Interpretive signs along the trails will describe significant natural features, the historic forest, and cultural landscape preservation and habitat restoration projects. Small trailhead parking areas will be made available in several areas to help minimize traffic congestion and parking problems.

PLANNING GUIDELINES FOR SOUTH HILLS DISTRICT

1. Spatial Organization and Land Patterns

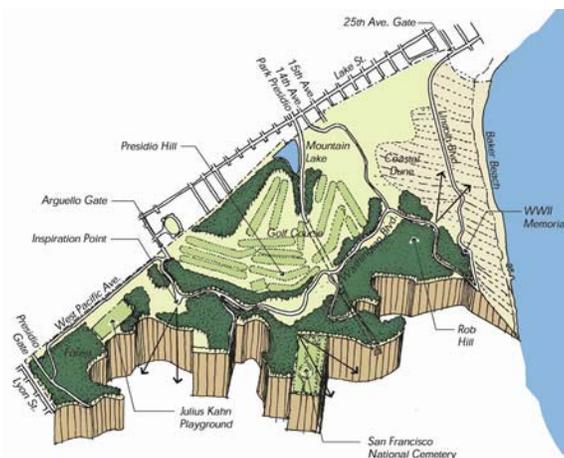
The Highest Ground at the Presidio. The district's diverse landscapes share at least one common characteristic: they occupy the highest ground at the Presidio. About 90 percent of Presidio lands having an elevation 200 feet or higher above sea level are within the South Hills district. Because of its rugged terrain, this area is the least disturbed in the park. Its lands encompass a wide range of natural resources, unique cultural landscapes, diverse recreation opportunities, and spectacular panoramic views. The influence of the rolling terrain is easily seen in the area's winding roads and the changing scenery.

Historic Ridgetop Forest. The historic Presidio forest stretches almost continuously over two miles along the ridgeline, connecting the high point at the southeast corner of the district with Presidio Hill and Rob Hill. Viewed from the city to the south and east, this forested ridgeline has been the Presidio's single most dominant visual feature for nearly a century. As one of the earliest examples of a large-scale forest planting in the western United States, it is a highly valued cultural landscape. The forest's mature stands of trees are among the most iconographic images of the Presidio landscape.

Dominance of Open Space Landscapes. The dominance of open spaces over built areas is a principal character-defining feature of the South Hills district. The district supports a wide range of native plant communities, including several rare or endangered plants uniquely adapted to the Presidio and found nowhere else in the world. Serpentine grassland habitat, which has disappeared from much of the Bay Area, is still found at Inspiration Point and along Lincoln Boulevard. Wildlife species from the native grey fox to the California quail still survive in this area. The district provides valuable habitat for migratory songbirds, raptors, and butterflies. The district also contains the largest single recreational land use at the Presidio - the 160-acre golf course, characterized by its own historic landscape of cultivated turf and long windrows of Monterey cypress. Mountain Lake, the only natural lake at the Presidio, supports numerous habitats and recreational opportunities. Most of the built features in the district are non-historic housing clusters.

SPATIAL ORGANIZATION AND LAND PATTERNS GUIDELINE

- Connect the Presidio's remnant ridgetop open space by restoring and rehabilitating native and forested landscapes, and by removing non-historic housing.



CONTIGUOUS OPEN SPACE ZONE FOLLOWING PRESIDIO'S SOUTHERN UPLANDS

2. Buildings and Structures

Non-Historic Housing. In the 1950s and the late 1960s, three major housing clusters (Wherry, West Washington, and East Washington) were constructed in areas that were previously forested and open.

Other Structures. Other, smaller development clusters include the historic water treatment facility near Baker Beach, the new golf clubhouse, and the non-historic Building 1750, which houses Presidio Trust operations and maintenance functions. In addition, the World War II Memorial is located at the west edge of the district overlooking the Pacific Ocean. In general, these and other small non-residential structures are discreetly located and do not affect the park-like character of the district in any significant way. Restroom facilities and orientation kiosks, for example, provide needed services in the park without undermining the visitor experience.

GUIDELINES FOR BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES

- Prohibit new construction in the South Hills, other than small structures to serve the visitor and management needs of the park.
- Locate required small structures (such as visitor bathrooms) to serve park users in a manner compatible in scale, massing, height, material, and color with the natural setting.
- Remove supporting infrastructure, as feasible, as part of building demolition in those areas planned for ecological restoration.

3. Open Space/Vegetation /Views

Native Plant Communities. The South Hills support native plant habitats such as coastal dune scrub and serpentine grasslands. These plant communities, together with a complex network of wetland systems and geologic features, represent part of the Presidio's natural history and pre-planted landscape. The corridors of native plants, water, and forest create important wildlife habitats and allow for a glorious diversity of bird species. Mountain Lake, a natural fresh water lake, provides diverse native habitat and recreational opportunities.

The Presidio Forest. The Presidio forest, planned by U.S. Army Major Jones in 1883 and planted throughout the 1890s and early 1900s, is a majestic stand of trees that provides a green oasis, towering above the surrounding city. The century-old forest, originally planted with blue gum eucalyptus, Monterey pine, Monterey cypress, and Blackwood acacia, is in critical condition today due to its age.

Along the ridge, clearings in the forest offer spectacular views and significant opportunities for recreational uses such as trails, campgrounds, informal playing fields, and picnic areas.

GUIDELINES FOR OPEN SPACE/VEGETATION/VIEWS

- Carry out *Vegetation Management Plan* (VMP) provisions for rehabilitating and restoring the Presidio forest and native plant areas; pursue restoration of native plant communities where housing is removed along Washington Boulevard.
- Maintain and improve historic and scenic views of the adjoining city, San Francisco Bay, and the Pacific Ocean from within the Presidio and from surrounding neighborhoods.
- Remove the Wherry Housing complex (Baker Beach Apartments) in phases, restore native plant communities, and expand the remnant adjacent central dune shrub habitat as indicated by the VMP.

4. Circulation and Access

East-West Road. The South Hills circulation system consists of a major east-west road (Washington Boulevard/Arguello Boulevard) winding along the Presidio's main ridgeline. It is crossed by the switchback curves of Park Boulevard running up and over the ridge from north to south. Battery Caulfield is a more recent connection extending off Washington Boulevard and leading to Wedemeyer Street and the Public Health Service Hospital.

Trails and Bike Routes. Large portions of the South Hills are free of vehicles. Washington and Arguello Boulevards offer a popular route for bicyclists, panoramic views of the surrounding landscape and city, and access to trails. Extensive trails, including the Bay Area Ridge Trail and the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, cross the ridgeline.



ARGUELLO AND WASHINGTON BOULEVARDS WINDING ALONG RIDGE

GUIDELINES FOR CIRCULATION AND ACCESS

- Remove most abandoned roads, parking areas, and driveways at the Wherry Housing complex (Baker Beach Apartments) when housing is removed; re-vegetate these areas or convert them to trail use.
- Establish a comprehensive system of paths and trails with clearly marked trailheads.
- Ensure that small parking areas provide convenient parking for visitors using trails and other recreational amenities along the ridge.