



A PARK FOR ALL FOREVER



MUIR WOODS AND THE HISTORY OF BAY AREA CONSERVATION

“Be the change you want to see in the world.” —Mahatma Gandhi

The San Francisco Bay Area, with the famous Golden Gate Bridge anchored in the untamed Marin Headlands and the gleaming city of San Francisco, has always been at the forefront of the nation’s environmental movement—a reputation with roots partially in the preservation of Muir Woods 100 years ago. The Bay Area is widely acknowledged as a place where environmental thinking, problem solving, and action are hallmarks of the region’s public, nonprofit and private sectors. From grassroots action to greenbelt preservation, from academic research and business innovation to issues of ecological justice and equity, the Bay Area has been among the vanguard of the environmental movement with international reach and renown.

As Richard A. Walker describes in his book, *The Country in the City*, the environmental movement in the Bay Area has unfolded in three acts. The first act included the Progressive Era reformers in San Francisco and the East Bay who stopped businessmen after the Gold Rush from taking over the parks from the people. The second act began after World War II when residents of the booming Peninsula and Marin suburbs resisted developers and worked to save the foothills and the Bay. The third act is set in the new millennium, as a new generation from the sophisticated metropolis of San Francisco establishes a top-down solution to regional planning and growth control to stem urban development plans and protect greenbelts and open space around the Bay Area.

The history of the Bay Area’s conservation conscience began with William Kent and the creation of Muir Woods

National Monument in 1908, and continued throughout the 20th century with further developments toward social progress. It was a long and arduous process, built over decades, and fought over acre by acre. In the 1970s, a group of citizen-activists stepped in to ensure that this extraordinary landscape would not be developed for apartment towers and freeways but would be kept for public benefit in perpetuity. Among these local heroes are giants of conservation such as Amy Meyer and Ed Wayburn. Other leaders also relentlessly campaigned for open space, cleanup of toxic wastes, and forest preservation.

Between 1964 and 1973, Congress and state legislatures—urged by leaders of conservation, wilderness, wildlife, and historic preservation organizations—passed laws and approved initiatives that gave planners and the public the necessary tools to protect the natural, scenic, and architectural heritage of the Bay Area. The grassroots environmental campaign to build a national park ultimately led to the protection of the lands collectively known as the Golden Gate National Parks—one of the world’s largest national parks in an urban setting.

Today, the National Park Service and its nonprofit partner, the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, continue to build on the platform of conservation and preservation laid down by our predecessors. With generous contributions from individual, corporate, and foundation donors, we continue to expand our “green” revolution by building a community dedicated to conserving the parks for the future.