



## **Bridging the Nature-Culture Divide III: Saving Nature in a Humanized World Conference**

January 23, 2015: Presidio Officers' Club, San Francisco, CA

Presented by: **The Cultural Landscape Foundation and The Presidio Trust**

In collaboration with: Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy and National Park Service

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## Abstracts

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### **Setting the Context**

**Charles A. Birnbaum, FASLA, FAAR**

#### **Shifting Attitudes and the Emergence of Holistic Stewardship: An Overview, Appraisal and Personal Thoughts**

When considering the dynamic ecosystem of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, a UNESCO designated biodiversity hotspot, that also possesses five National Historic Landmarks and 12 National Register Properties, what criteria should be applied when guiding and managing change? How is success measured? What is the role of park stewards in the education and strategic communications messaging associated with public engagement – one that is often in a highly charged political arena? How do project work, stewardship, and interpretive efforts nurture inquiry while promoting acts of self-discovery? This opening address will aim to not only address these complex challenges, but will also nest them within a larger historic and social context.

First, the stage will be set for the conference's presentations. Here, the origins of the idea of a shared value system – one that includes nature, history and scenery will be established. Initially in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in New England by F.L. Olmsted, Sr. and Charles Eliot; then with Olmsted, Jr., the Organic Act and the establishment of the National Park Service in 1916, and ultimately how it expanded in the Bay Area in the 1960s through community-rooted efforts by Lawrence Halprin at Sea Ranch where it became grounded in environmental and ecological planning and design.

Following this foundation, the opportunities and challenges that play out today will be explored – all the while advancing the idea that if the nature/culture “interface” was made more transparent and richly interpreted for the visiting public, then perhaps it would yield educated, less segmented, more fully engaged constituencies.

**Michael Boland, The Presidio Trust**

#### **Sustainable Park Management at the Presidio of San Francisco**

For over 230 years, soldiers stationed at the Presidio of San Francisco defended the entrance to San Francisco Bay under three flags – Spanish, Mexican and American. The site was constantly redeveloped to meet the evolving needs of the Spanish, Mexican and American militaries, leaving one of the richest collection of cultural landscapes and historic structures in the United States. Because of these significant resources, the Presidio Army base was designated a National Historic Landmark District in 1962, and was included within the legislative boundary of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA), when the national park was created in 1972. Because of the outsized challenge of rehabilitating the Presidio and preserving it as a national park, in 1996 the Presidio Trust was founded and mandated to work with the National Park Service (NPS) to create the first financially self-sufficient national park site in the United States. Through adaptive re-use of the post's 800 buildings, a new national park community that generates enough revenue to support the post has been created.



Although nearly all of the Presidio was developed or landscaped over the generations by the soldiers that served at the post, the military inadvertently preserved small fragments of San Francisco's pre-contact landscape in areas they never developed. Constituting no more than 10% of the Presidio's land area, these natural areas house astonishing biodiversity, with 13 native plant communities, nearly 400 native plant species, 21 special status plant species, and nearly 300 bird species. Over the last twenty years, the Presidio Trust, NPS, and Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy have worked with hundreds of organizations and thousands of community volunteers to preserve and expand this important reservoir of biodiversity while simultaneously restoring the Presidio community and achieving financial self-sufficiency. Preserving and enhancing these natural systems has required new strategies aimed not only at the natural systems themselves, but also at the post's developed areas and the surrounding San Francisco community, giving rise to a new indigenous model for stewarding nature in the urban environment.

**Peter Del Tredici, Harvard Graduate School of Design**  
**Human Nature: Urban Ecology**

Urban ecosystems are the ultimate manifestation of the dynamic conflict between humans and nature-- between our desire for neat, orderly landscapes on the one hand and our fear of messy ecological chaos on the other. This presentation will focus on the plants that grow spontaneously in cities and their remarkable ability to flourish in spite of the stressful environmental conditions that are concentrated in its soils. Cities clearly fit the definition of a novel ecosystem and their vegetation reflects the irrevocable past and presages an unpredictable future. In our modern world, where the environment is as globalized as the economy, the rigid categorization of organisms as either native or non-native has lost its effectiveness as a tool for managing the ecological changes that are taking place around us. For better or worse, the vegetation of our cities is as cosmopolitan as its human population and, quite frankly, is better adapted to "unnatural" urban ecosystems than the native species that once grew there. In the era of shrinking municipal budgets, this vegetation can be viewed as part of the solution for cleaning up the mess we have made of the planet.

**Panel 1: Preserving Nature in the Urban Environment**

**Brad McKee, Landscape Architecture Magazine**  
**Developing in Two Directions: Repairing Cities, Preparing Cities**

As the things we want and need from contemporary cities changes radically, particularly in the digital age, the ways they can be configured and their land can be used are changing as well. Centers of production need not be near centers of consumption, causing a rearrangement of industry on a global scale. Industrial modernization is causing the movement of capital production across the world. First-line Western economies are seeing their cities' manufacturing centers and ports shrink as a service economy supplants them. At the same time, burgeoning ports in Asia, Latin America and, increasingly, Africa, are forcing unbridled growth on ill-prepared metropolises. For legacy cities in the West, vacancies left by disused factories and abandoned neighborhoods hold the potential to revive variations on the nature that urbanization erased, or, at the very least, to stop natural losses or manage open spaces in more a more ecologically productive fashion. There are fresh hazards, however, in the world's many hectic megacities, where nature is being rapidly and obviously trampled just as they enter an age when tides of new urban migrants would benefit decisively from the preservation and cultivation of nature. How can post-industrial cities regenerate lost forms of nature? How can new urban development be controlled to avoid the total losses of nature that cities before them did?

**Geoff Cape, Evergreen – Toronto Canada****Building a culture of nature: citizen engagement and big and small ideas for an urbanizing world**

We are in the early stages of what many refer to as the Urban Century, with over half of the world's population living in urban areas. For most of the past 500 years, urban planners, architects and citizens alike have tried to dominate nature and push wilderness to the edges of our cities. We have channeled our rivers, manipulated our waterfronts, paved our children's school grounds, and developed suburban areas with perfect lawns and lollipop trees. We have organized our cities in grids – and as a result we don't understand the land beneath our feet, the natural world. The opportunity to rethink, redesign and rebuild our collective future by focusing on the idea of welcoming nature back to cities is very exciting. It will change the shape of our cities and the way we live. It will also impact our attitudes and our behaviors.

This presentation will begin with a focus on the big picture – a view of urbanization trends globally - but quickly move to specific projects Evergreen is leading across Canada to help influence the future of cities. Creative interventions that help to integrate nature into the design of cities. I will highlight a series of big and small projects such as the redesign of over 5000 school grounds in Canada, and the engagement of tens of thousands of citizens in; daylighting rivers, building urban farms, restoring landscapes and revitalizing communities -- and how this work is gaining momentum in Canada. I will touch on plans for Toronto's 44,000 acre ravine system (the largest in the world), and Toronto's 1.8 million acre green belt (the largest in the world), as well as our work to rethink and rebuild a former 42 acre industrial site in the middle of the city – as a centre for nature and the future of cities.

**Robin Grossinger, San Francisco Estuary Institute****Can cities contribute to resilient ecosystems?**

Our cities have not been designed with ecology in mind. As a result they have been highly destructive to local ecosystems. Nevertheless research shows that cities around the world consistently support native species from the local ecosystem. Cities, often located in biodiversity hotspots on rivers or estuaries, have the potential to increase the health and resilience of local, regional, and continental ecosystems. As urbanization continues and ecological communities try to adapt to climate change, cities are likely to become increasingly important to the persistence of native species.

Fortunately, cities constantly change. As aging infrastructure is replaced in coming decades, there is an opportunity to reshape urban landscapes to both support and benefit from natural physical and biological processes. Yet it is extremely challenging to envision cities as functioning landscapes, operating at the geographic and temporal scale needed to support resilient ecosystems.

At SFEI's Center for Resilient Landscapes, we are working with partners to develop locally specific ecological frameworks that enable the diverse management activities that shape and maintain urban landscapes – from flood protection, storm water management, and urban forestry to business park landscaping and green building design -- to achieve the functions and scale needed for ecosystem resilience.

**Jane Wolff, University of Toronto****Reading hybrid ecologies: a working dictionary for San Francisco's shoreline**

A careful look at the boundary between San Francisco and San Francisco Bay tests—and defies—standard terms for categorizing landscapes. After a century and a half of intense inhabitation, nature can't be separated from culture, or ecology from economy, or even land from water. The bay and its edges are ecological hybrids, products of long, reiterative interactions among human intentions, geographic circumstances and environmental processes. It's not easy to describe the conditions along the shore, and because language is fundamental to perception, the landscape's nuances are hidden in plain sight.



This talk will draw on my recent design research project, *Bay Lexicon*, an exhibit commissioned by the Exploratorium of San Francisco for its Bay Observatory Gallery and the subject of a book in process. *Bay Lexicon* defines a working vocabulary for observing, exploring, and coming to terms with the bay's hybrid ecology. Its forty-eight illustrated flash cards describe sights and situations that make up San Francisco's boundary with the water. These places provoke enquiry about the evolving relationship between natural processes and cultural desires and demonstrate that both sets of forces are in constant negotiation at scales from the body to the region.

## **Panel 2: Building Awareness and Galvanizing the Public**

**Chris Spence, Institute at the Golden Gate**

**Why engagement matters and how do we engage effectively in a rapidly-changing environment**

Most forward-thinking conservation and landscape professionals understand that people are not just a part of the conservation problem, but also critical to its solution. Whether as voters, volunteers, activists or future stewards, the public will be critical to the survival and ongoing relevance of our protected urban areas.

How should our professional community engage effectively with the public, particularly in a time of rapid technological, social, economic and demographic change? The answers lie in engagement that listens to and serves the needs of our entire population, not just traditional users. This panel will share their experiences in how land management leaders, landscape designers and other professionals can engage effectively and make public land and urban protected areas more relevant and of service to a wider community. Speakers will identify emerging best practice both in the U.S. and internationally, and provide examples of how publicly-accessible urban landscapes are providing valuable services in public health and education, and engaging people through art and other culturally-appropriate connections

**Nina Roberts, San Francisco State University & Pacific Leadership Institute**

**Connecting with Communities across Cultures: Empower, engage, and encourage to make a difference**

Nature does not create cultural divides, people do. This presentation includes understanding sample barriers and valuable ways to strategize in building awareness. How can we "galvanize the public" by cultivating stewards out of new users or potential visitors? How can we open our minds and hearts, and make room to discover how others embrace nature and make meaning from their own experiences? How can land managers continue to listen and learn from the very communities they're trying to serve? Understanding multiple points of view often helps dispel persistent myths about the cultural dynamics emerging in relation to natural environments. Connecting with communities can be challenging yet efforts are vital and relationship building, in the spirit of bonding with our neighbors, is essential. Our challenge sometimes lies in creating cross-cultural opportunities for people to learn from each other and share power amidst inequity. Connecting people with parks through education and recreation provides an open door that is all too often closed. Nature inspires all people for very different reasons that are often unknown or misunderstood. Nature does not know the difference between cultures. Delegates will be challenged to think differently and determine what's needed for real change.

**Sarah Schultz, Walker Art Center**

**Would You Like Some Pie With Your Climate Change? Social and Creative Approaches to Sustainability**

Growing numbers of artists today are working collaboratively through social and participatory formats, often in public and community settings and well outside the traditional context of the art museum or gallery. For many artists, this direct engagement of the world has them addressing issues like environmental sustainability and



justice, climate change, and resource scarcity in highly opened ended and novel ways. What lessons can be gleaned from these socially-engaged artists who approach public engagement as something convivial, reciprocal, participatory, and even playful? How do artists invite the public into complex, abstract, and difficult topics? How can creative approaches engage a broader diversity of voices and viewpoints? Case studies of artist projects such as *Pie Lab*, *Water Bar*, and *Create: The Community Meal*, will provide a springboard for a discussion about dynamic approaches to exploring our complex personal and collective relationships to the natural world.

**Jessica Chen and Guilder Ramirez, Crissy Field Center**

**Engaging and empowering young people in our parks: The Crissy Field Center story**

In 2001, Crissy Field Center was established with one major goal: to offer relevant, multicultural environmental education that would inspire young people to lead positive changes in the national parks, their communities, and their lives. What innovative program strategies have been successful in engaging and empowering new young audiences to the park? The Center's program participants are discovering their national parks—and connecting with their communities—in new and meaningful ways. Starting at the age of 5, young people can start up a “ladder of opportunity” at the Center, progressing through stepped programs that promote long-term relationships, redefine our connections with the natural and urban environment, and build the skills our future stewards will need to create a more sustainable and just society.

The Crissy Field Center has partnered with over 100 community organizations and schools to reach youth who have had little opportunity to experience national parklands. The Center's community engagement prioritizes relationship building with teachers, community leaders, families, and individual youth. Our programs work to eliminate barriers to accessing resources throughout the GGNRA. Barriers includes transportation, trainings, awareness, and relevancy. Crissy Field Center is committed to co-designing programing that addresses the needs and interest of the communities its serving, a shining example of this is the Inspiring Young Emerging Leaders (I-YEL) program which will be shared and discussed by two program alumni.