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V O L U M E 1



SUTRO HISTORIC DISTRICT
Comprehensive Design
and
Environmental Assessment

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
L GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

ON MICROFILM

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PREFACE

This Comprehensive Design Plan and Environmental Assessment for the Sutro Historic District has been developed within the existing context of both national legislative mandates and National Park Service management policies. The Plan is a conscious effort to address **both** natural and cultural resources, because at this site the physical attributes and biotic systems of the larger landscape contribute to its historical significance.

Virtually all cultural landscapes evolve from and are dependent on natural resources--this is the message of the Sutro site. Further, the Plan has evolved in the context of "sustainable development" which embodies the intent of fulfilling the needs of current generations without limiting the ability of future generations to procure what they need to sustain themselves. It is a concept that recognizes that human civilization is an integral part of the natural world. Central to the concept of sustainable development is the idea that decisions from initial concepts through design construction are evaluated against principles of natural and cultural resource protection.

The Adolph Sutro Historic District is located in the Ocean Beach District of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. The GGNRA was established by Congress in 1972 with the stated purpose to "preserve for public use and enjoyment certain areas of Marin and San Francisco Counties, California, possessing outstanding natural, historic, scenic and recreational values, and to provide for the maintenance of needed recreational open space necessary to (the) urban environment."

In 1992 the National Park Service authored a Statement for Management of the GGNRA which included objectives such as the identification, preservation and enhancement of cultural landscape values, considering the dynamics of natural systems and the need to maintain species diversity; the protection and enhancement of the natural processes and biological diversity found within the GGNRA, recognizing its unique position as part of a biosphere preserve in an urban setting; the minimization of human caused or accelerated impacts and processes including erosion, invasion by alien plants, degradation of air and water quality and disruption of the natural flow of water; and the location of development in areas previously disturbed by human activity whenever possible.

Future interpretive programs will be developed to explain the role of the GGNRA in preserving our natural and cultural heritage. They will provide for activities that are compatible with the preservation of park resources and that promote a better understanding of these resources for public recreational

benefit and inspiration. Nature is reestablishing its presence and in its continuing process of reclamation it is regenerating a floral and faunal diversity that is rare in an urban setting.

Through the juxtaposition and interpretation of both natural and cultural resources within the Sutro Historic District the public will gain an understanding and appreciation for the interrelationship of these unique values. Further, the site will inspire respect for the complex and delicate balance of these values which is required to ensure a sustainable future on the planet. The Plan functions as a lens which focuses on the special features of the site as well as a mirror which reflects the site's relationship with the region and the world.

In the NPS planning process, a Comprehensive Design Plan is an intermediate step between a General Management Plan and technical documents for the actual construction of a facility. It is a "master plan" level of detail where the location of elements and their relationship on the site are described. The specific design of facilities will be accommodated in future studies with a greater level of detail in regard to form and materials as well as potential environmental impacts.

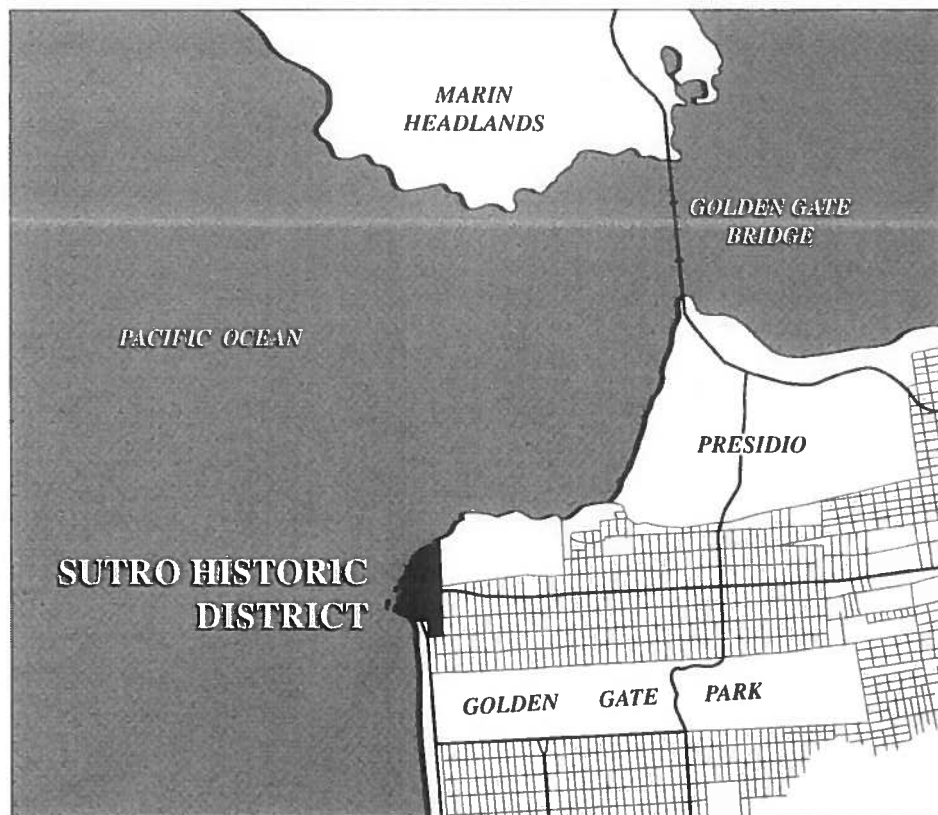
1. NEED FOR THE PROPOSAL

1.1 REGIONAL CONTEXT

The Sutro Historic District, located at the westernmost point of San Francisco, is part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area which encompasses much of southern Marin County, central San Mateo County and spans the northern and western edges of San Francisco. It includes Baker and Ocean beaches, historic Fort Mason and Crissy Field, and will soon include the Presidio of San Francisco, 1,400 acres of extraordinary cultural and natural resources. The District is located north of Ocean Beach and south of Lincoln Park, a San Francisco City park. The western entry to Golden Gate Park is a half mile to the south, and San Francisco's Financial District is approximately seven miles to the east.

1.2 SITE CONTEXT

The area surrounding the Cliff House, Sutro Baths, Sutro Heights and the USS San Francisco Memorial Complex at Point Lobos is referred to as the



Regional Context

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Aerial View of Sutro Historic District

Sutro Historic District (Figure 1-1). The Sutro District has been a major recreational attraction for over 100 years, since its development by civic leader Adolph Sutro in the 1880s. Its history, natural environment and spectacular ocean views are an unusual combination in an urban setting.

The District is bounded on the west by the Pacific Ocean, and to the east by the grid of the City which ends at 48th Avenue. Fort Miley and Lincoln Park complete the eastern and northern boundaries. The southern boundary includes the northern end of Ocean Beach and abuts the privately owned Parcel 4 north of Balboa Street.

1.3 EXISTING CONDITIONS AND ISSUES

Today the District is in a deteriorated condition and does not provide the level of visitor experience that is expected at locations within the National Park system in the United States. Heavy erosion and lack of vegetative cover on the site, particularly in the area of the former Baths, create both visual blight and pedestrian safety concerns on the steep bluffs above the surf. Rubble from partially demolished structures and rusting exposed reinforcing metal create dangerous conditions for visitors as well as accelerating maintenance costs. The Cliff House and surrounding terraces, the Point Lobos overlook and the Parapet at the Heights are also severely weathered and unsafe. Although the NPS has posted warnings, deaths and other injuries due to falls from cliffs and uncontrolled access to the ruins continue to occur.

2.2 PROGRAMMATIC AND FUNCTIONAL REQUIREMENTS

The Comprehensive Design for the Sutro Historic District was driven by the need to resolve a complex set of issues. Natural systems, historic landscape fragments and recent human intervention were to be balanced to support future use and provide a quality visitor experience. Attracting *more* visitors was not considered to be a priority.

Expanding on the four major goals discussed previously, the study team identified more specific design objectives. The design for Sutro Historic District will:

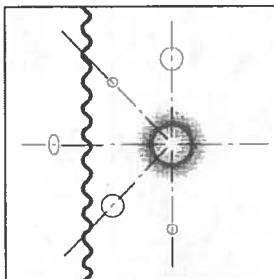
- Distinguish the site as an important component of a major National Park;
- Look to the future as well as to the past;
- Continue to celebrate recreation, adventure and fun, maintaining a diversity of uses which maximize the Pacific Ocean “edge experience”;
- Integrate significant cultural landscape features of the District as identified in the Cultural Landscape Evaluation without compromising their integrity;
- Ensure that the ruins will not be overdone with nostalgia; some elements will be rehabilitated and preserved for interpretive purposes while others will be left alone—**released**—to deteriorate; most will remain accessible to visitors;
- Provide new design elements which are distinctive as a new layer of information or meaning on the site and which will promote a deeper awareness of **both** cultural and natural resources; there will be varying levels of interpretive complexity for different users; everything will not be explained—much will be left to inspire the imagination;
- Express the human connection to elemental natural forces—wind, tides, fog; this will be made as evident to contemporary users as it was to aboriginal inhabitants of the site; where possible, these elements will provide alternative energy sources;
- Enhance the natural setting to meet the needs of the urban community for more contemplative and unstructured recreation;

- Maintain unobstructed ocean views for residents and motorists and enhance existing observation areas to maximize the “edge experience” for all visitors;
- Balance activity areas throughout the entire district to disperse visitor use;
- Provide better pedestrian access throughout the District, while diverting foot traffic from environmentally sensitive or hazardous areas; significant recreational and interpretive opportunities for handicapped individuals will also be provided;
- Resolve circulation conflicts between busses, automobiles and pedestrians; maintain and centralize current levels of parking and provide a strong linkage to the City's public transit system;
- Provide linkages to NPS and City recreational facilities and trails adjacent to the District;
- Retain the Cliff House as a food and beverage establishment; revenue generation from other concessions may be continued in other locations if it can be accomplished in a tasteful manner.

2.3 COMPREHENSIVE DESIGN

Overview

Landscape rehabilitation is the proposed design approach; as defined by the NPS, **rehabilitation** is a process that retains the historic character of the landscape while making changes to the property for new uses and interpretation.



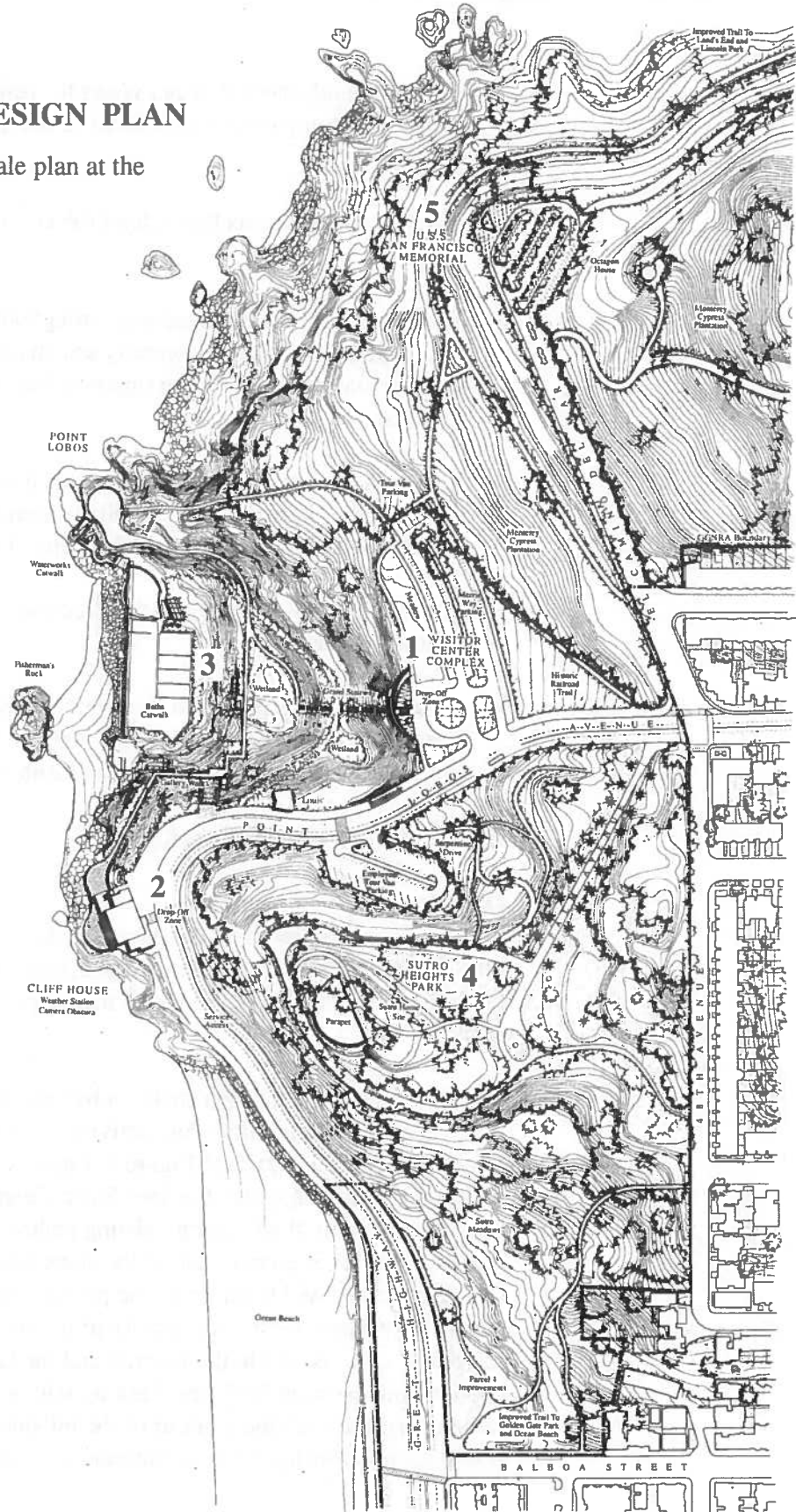
Concept Diagram

The Comprehensive Design strikes a balance between the natural and built environments with facilities and activity areas located primarily at the Cliff House and Merrie Way (see Figure 2-1 and the Illustrative Plan, back pocket of report). The design also ties into Sutro Heights Park and the USS San Francisco Memorial site along existing pedestrian ways. A new NPS Visitor Center Complex is envisioned on the slope below the Merrie Way parking lot. This facility will function as the primary orientation and information center for visitors, telling the history of the site's evolution, explaining recreation options within the District and the GGNRA, and providing concession and restroom facilities. Parking will be consolidated here and the lot will be terraced with the contour of the hillside to minimize its visual impact. It will also be configured to accommodate a vehicular drop-off area.

Figure 2-1 COMPREHENSIVE DESIGN PLAN

Note: Refer also to the full scale plan at the back of this report.

1. Visitor Center Complex and Parking
2. Cliff House and Terrace Overlook
3. Baths Ruins and Wetlands
4. Sutro Heights Park
5. U.S.S. San Francisco Memorial and Overlook



The Cliff House will be maintained as a “road house” for both residents and visitors. In keeping with the sustainable development mandate of the NPS, the structure will be rehabilitated—through alteration and repair—to accommodate contemporary use while preserving those portions or features of the original structure that are important in defining its significance (see Cultural Landscape Report). The terrace will be renovated to provide additional viewing and sitting areas as well as access to a barrier-free trail above the Baths. The assets of the Musée Mécanique will be relocated to the Visitor Center Complex and the Camera Obscura will be integrated into the Cliff House. A climate-sheltered observation area, displays of weather information and an elevator for terrace access will also be incorporated in the new Cliff House. Louis’ Restaurant will be allowed to remain for the near future without additions or alternations with the exception of ADA improvements and safety repairs. The North Annex will be removed with most facilities relocated to the Visitor Center Complex. Gift and souvenir sales will be accommodated at the Cliff House. All tour buses will be downsized and bus parking will be relocated to an employee parking lot. Six tour vans will also be accommodated in the Merrie Way Lot.

Native vegetation will be reestablished throughout the District to expand both the natural diversity and the site’s interpretive potential. The great bowl-shaped landform of the Baths area will be stabilized and revegetated and the ruins will be interpreted as a cultural landscape. A system of steps, pathways, bridges and catwalks will provide safe but dramatic pedestrian access through the ruins and to the tunnel and the Point Lobos overlook north of the site. These elements will be designed to have minimal impact on wetland habitat. The “waterworks” will be reactivated to the extent possible to inform and entertain visitors during high tide events.

Sutro Heights will continue to function as a neighborhood park because major visitor uses will be centered at the Visitor Center Complex and the Cliff House. A portion of the historic Ferries and Cliff House Railroad alignment will become a pedestrianway from the Visitor Center to the corner of 48th Avenue and Point Lobos Avenue, linking to Palm Avenue, the historic entrance to the Heights. Pedestrian circulation will be reestablished, along the historic path network, to the site of the Sutro home and beyond to the Parapet and Esplanade. The historic gardens flanking Palm Avenue will be restored to give a sense of what the heights were like when Sutro resided there.

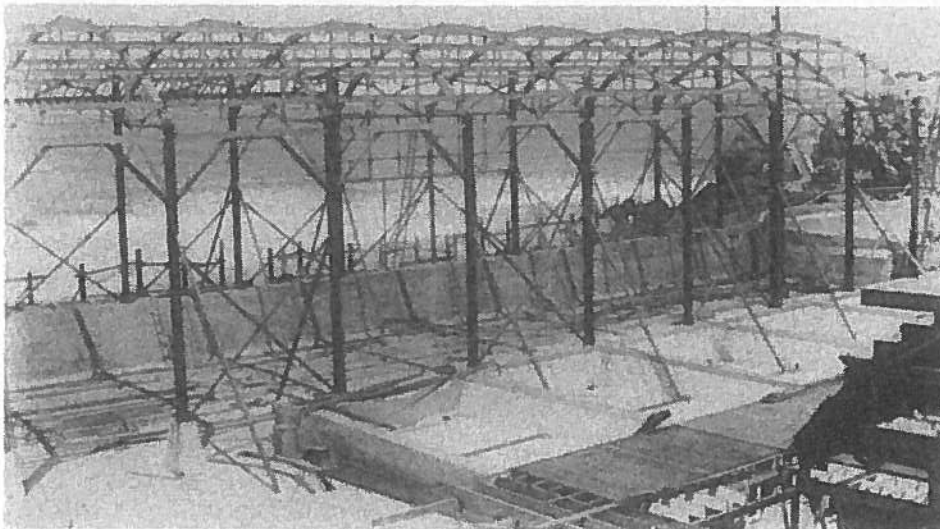
The historic Cypress plantation north of the Visitor Center Complex will be managed to establish a healthy forest canopy. The historic railroad alignment will continue to be used as a pedestrian path to the Land's End overlook

where the USS San Francisco Memorial will be relocated and landscaped to give it a more ceremonial presence. Parking in this area will be redesigned to eliminate the vast expanse of asphalt which now exists. Trails from this area to the north and Sutro Heights to the south will tie into the coastal trail network now under development within the GGNRA.

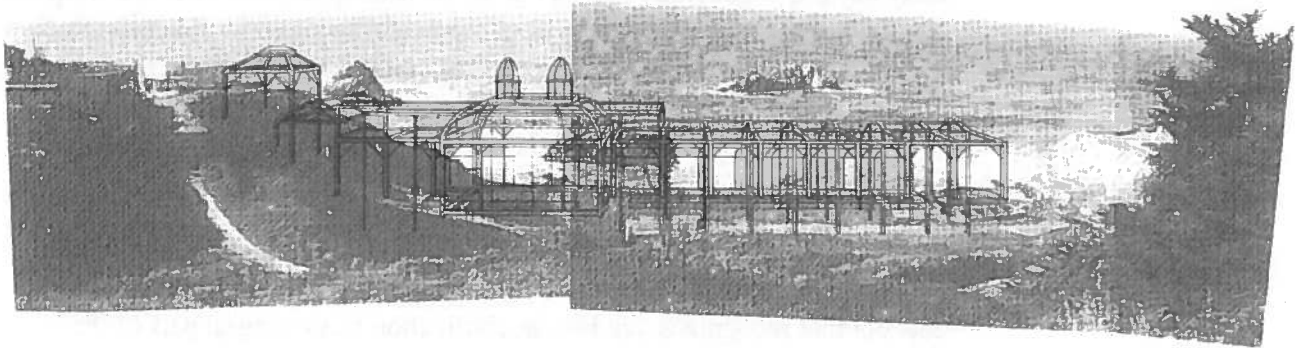
Visitor Center Complex

This structure will be a contemporary design which demonstrates the concept of sustainable architecture and is expressive of the site's geology and technological present. Built of the materials of the earlier structure—glass, steel and concrete, the two-level building will sit lightly on the hillside below the Merrie Way parking area. A partially earth-sheltered building is implied, with different levels suggesting the shifting movement of the geologic strata of the site. A glazed truss-supported roof will fill the upper level with natural light evoking the atmosphere of the original bath house.

A Grand Stairway will puncture the building, providing an axial connection between the parking area and the lower Baths as well as access to an upper observation deck and the building interior (Figure 2-2). The Stairway will be carefully designed and constructed so that it does not adversely impact the existing wetland habitat. Concrete rubble available from onsite demolition or other District locations could be recycled in the construction of this stairway to emulate the character of existing materials on this site and to make an interpretive statement about recycling. An elevator will provide easy access to the facility and observation decks for the physically challenged. A weather station here, if it is not feasible at the Cliff House, would be an active re-



Sutro Baths Structural System (Historic Photo)



Ghost Structure (Photo Montage)

Ghost Structure of the Baths

In the spirit of applying the technology of the 21st century to the future design of the site (much as Adolph Sutro applied 20th century technology in his day), a laser image “reconstruction” of the baths is proposed. Such an event would commemorate and interpret the extraordinary engineering of the baths while leaving the site completely intact. The intent is that this “reconstruction” would occur sporadically, and only when site weather conditions are appropriate. It would not be widely publicized; as with the aboriginal inhabitants of the area, potential spectators would be encouraged to develop a more specific knowledge of the elemental forces at work on the site—specifically wind and fog. Laser equipment contained in a small projection booth within the Visitor Center would project a computer-generated image toward the west. This full scale image would have the interpretive potential of “ghost structures” used in other National Park facilities. They could be wire frame “drawings” of the Baths structures and water works possibly in combination with still photographs; they would be visible only if reflected from the fog. Visitors would view the event from either the Visitor Center deck or from the Grand Stairway seating area.

Cliff House

The present Cliff House is the third structure to carry that famous name. It has been extensively altered since it was built in 1909 by Adolph Sutro's daughter Emma Merritt. A three-story reinforced concrete building constructed in the neoclassical style which flourished from 1900 to 1920 in North America, it was a reaction to the excesses of the Victorian era. Concrete was the material of choice because of the need to provide a structure which could withstand earthquakes and fire.



Cliff House and Annex

The 1909 structure has had a series of additions and modifications since its early days. It is generally agreed that its present appearance detracts from the beauty of the site and the potential of the magnificent view. A **rehabilitation** will improve the utility or function of this cultural landscape element through repair or alteration, to make possible an efficient contemporary use while preserving those portions or features that are important in defining its historic significance.

The National Park Service has recently adopted the policy inherent in the emergency United Nations initiative on sustainable development. It is a concept that recognizes that human civilization is an integral part of the natural world. The concept further holds that future technologies must function primarily within bioregional patterns and scales. Sustainable development implies using only those resources that can be renewed and employing recycled materials where possible. Recycling buildings conserves energy. The Cliff House will be a local demonstration of sustainable architectural principles. This assumes an architecture that can be compelling and inspiring as well as sparing of resources.

The Comprehensive Design Plan is a framework for a district, a 100-acre cultural and natural landscape. Its intent is the enhancement of a place rather than of a particular building within that district. Detailed architectural programming, design, engineering and cost analyses will be undertaken by the NPS as a next step in determining the rehabilitation potential of the Cliff House. It will require an inspired architectural approach to commemorate relevant elements of the past, accommodate present needs and put forth a statement for a sustainable future.

The Cliff House will be upgraded to meet present accessibility standards and provide a new service access. Storage and receiving spaces will be located internally so that those functions can be removed from the restaurant's front door. The existing driveway ramp south of the building will be adapted for service access and a new drop off area will be designed to create a more distinctive entrance to the restaurant and simplify vehicular circulation. In addition, an elevator tower and the Camera Obscura are now envisioned as special components of the Cliff House of the future. These elements must be added while maintaining the building's historic character as well as the ongoing concession operation which is important for the economic vitality of the GGNRA. In 1978, Public Law 95-625 was enacted providing that "in the administration of those parcels known as...the Cliff House Properties and Louis' Restaurant, the Secretary shall credit any proceeds from the rental of