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Quail Recovery Plan

For the
City of San Francisco

FINAL JANUARY 2004

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The Quail Recovery Task Force

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- Steve Cockrell, Coordinator, San Francisco Parks Coalition
- Arthur Feinstein, Director, Golden Gate Audubon Society
- Alan Hopkins, Director, Save the Quail Campaign
- Nancy Wuerfel, San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Status of California quail in San Francisco

In the 1920's, biologists Grinnell and Miller (1944) described California quail as common and widespread throughout San Francisco. Ornithologist Ralf Hoffman (1927) found California quail common throughout city parks and estates where chaparral or ornamental shrubs provided sufficient cover.

The continued development of San Francisco and changes in management practices in City parklands subsequently eliminated much of the suitable habitat available for quail. Removal of dense brush and the remaining corridors for quail has essentially isolated a few small quail populations within a few parks in the city.

1.2 Background

In July 2000, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors approved a Resolution naming the California quail (*Callipepla californica*) the official City bird and calling for Golden Gate Audubon Society, San Francisco SPCA, and other interested citizens to create a plan for quail recovery in San Francisco that would be implemented without killing other animals.

The recovery plan presented to the Commission on the Environment in February 2002 met with significant community concern. As a result, Jared Blumenfeld, Director of the San Francisco Department of the Environment (SFE), met with the conflicting parties and suggested the creation of a consensus plan that would have broad community support.

The resulting Quail Recovery Task Force convened in December 2002 with support from SFE and facilitation by Community Boards. The Golden Gate Audubon Society, San Francisco SPCA, and San Francisco Parks Coalition held discussions and visited potential quail recovery sites to develop a plan.

2.0 THE PLAN

2.1 Urban Context

As the second most densely populated city in the United States, San Francisco's parks must accommodate many competing demands. The Quail Recovery Plan attempts to find sustainable ways to bring California quail back to San Francisco's parks in co-existence with other activities and in cooperation with other park users.

2.2 Purpose

The purpose of recovery is to reinforce and reestablish viable populations of California quail in San Francisco's city parklands consistent with the existing designated uses of those parklands.

The intent of this Plan is to provide guidelines that create the least conflict with competing uses and promotes the most cooperation among all park stakeholders.

2.3 Strategy

The recovery strategy is to defuse issues of conflicting interests regarding recreational, cultural, and animal welfare issues by locating sites with the fewest potential issues; by minimizing the scope of actions that need to be taken other than planting quail-supporting vegetation in appropriate locations; and by emphasizing a consensus-building approach to management.

2.4 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

2.4.1 Habitat

It is well established that providing viable habitat is the paramount requirement for species recovery. The decline of quail in San Francisco in recent years has coincided with a decrease in the amount of suitable quail habitat due to development and to changes in park management practices, especially the clearing out of brush and understory cover.

A guiding principle of this plan is that provision of habitat for quail, including adequate cover, roosting, forage, nesting sites, and water, will be the focus of recovery efforts. Other concerns, such as human activities and predator control, shall be addressed through habitat management rather than direct controls.

2.4.2 Non-Native and Native Habitat

This Plan also recognizes that the basic habitat requirements of quail enable them to live in properly managed park situations including golf courses, landscaped areas, and other non-native environments. At the same time, the Plan recognizes the aesthetic, spiritual, educational, and ecological value of preserving and enhancing opportunities for quail recovery in San Francisco's remnant native habitats.

2.4.3 Predator Control

Board of Supervisors Resolution No. 631-00 specifically requires a quail recovery effort that will be implemented "without killing other animals." Removal or relocation of predators may result in death and other unintended negative consequences. Therefore, any proposed removal or relocation of predators of any kind must be submitted in writing to the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department for review and recommendation. In each proposed case, the Department will consult with San Francisco SPCA to determine whether the relocation or removal is feasible and, if so, how best it can be done. If the relocation or removal is approved by SFRPD, the Department will utilize the pro bono services of SF/SPCA to accomplish the task unless SF/SPCA declines to participate.

2.4.4. Public Access

California quail adapt well to human presence. The Plan recognizes that quail recovery is compatible with continued multipurpose use of city parklands. Therefore, another guiding principal is that quail recovery shall be implemented without imposing restrictions on human access and activities at recovery sites.

2.5 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Because of the essentially urban land use context of the Plan, recovery objectives will necessarily depend on active management and will not conflict with existing designated public recreational uses of the parks.

2.5.1 A Sustainable Quail Population

Based upon historical data and the habitat space and resources available, the goal of this plan is to establish a sustainable winter population within 10 years of at least 300 California quail in San Francisco's City parklands (counts to be taken in December). Winter population represents the lowest seasonal ebb for quail and serves as a conservative baseline.

Yearly fluctuations due to climatic factors and other uncontrollable variables should be expected and monitored. But, a minimum winter population of 300 quail should be maintained to the extent possible.

2.5.2 Managed Sustainability

It should be understood that “sustainability” is used here in the sense of managed sustainability. Due to insurmountable endemic stresses and the fragmentation of San Francisco’s urban environment, this plan does not attempt to recreate natural ecological conditions that would sustain large quail populations in perpetuity without human stewardship.

2.5.3 Preserve and Enhance the Quail Population in San Francisco

In order to effectively preserve and enhance the quail population, it will be necessary to (a) assess the current population and its habitat, (b) initiate enhancement efforts, and (c) monitor the habitat and quail populations to determine the success of these efforts.

2.5.4 Recovery Sites

The following four initial proposed recovery sites have been identified by the Task Force as providing the best potential for habitat with the fewest potential conflicts of use:

1. Lincoln Park [location boundaries to be discussed]
2. Strybing Arboretum [boundaries to be discussed]
3. McLaren Park (south of Mansell Avenue)
4. Harding Park Golf Course (see map)

2.5.5 The Presidio

Although the Presidio is home to one of the few known remaining California quail colonies in San Francisco, it is not included in this plan as a quail recovery site because it is federal property and is not managed by the San Francisco Recreation and Park Department. However, cooperation with the Presidio quail recovery effort is expected.

3.0 PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

3.1 MANAGEMENT

3.1.1 Cooperative Management Approach

This Plan is based on a cooperative management approach - making a special effort to reach out to the community stakeholders to create broad-based participation, buy-in, and support.

3.1.2 Outreach

This is truly a city-wide effort that needs to include schools, companion animal groups, birdwatchers, and all San Franciscans who love the outdoors. An atmosphere of inclusion and tolerance toward other park users is critical.

The SFRPD shall bring new quail recovery location proposals to the Recreation and Park Commission, or appropriate Commission committees, for outreach to all park users to the extent such a process is required for all other park use proposals. The SPCA shall be notified directly of all such proposals.

3.1.3 Participation from the Inception

Individual citizens and group representatives should be encouraged to participate from the beginning of the recovery process. Participation from the inception ensures that efforts remain cooperative and that no unexpected issues delay implementation. At golf course recovery sites, for example, there should be outreach to golfers, golf course management and the surrounding community.

3.1.4 Scientific and Expert Input

Scientific and expert input are essential to quail recovery and will be utilized within the guidelines of the Plan.

Recreation and Park Department staff with expertise in wildlife biology, vegetation management, and park management will work with the Golden Gate Audubon Society and others to provide scientific and expert input to the implementation of the Plan.

3.2 Departmental Participation and Funding

Because this Plan focuses on municipal parklands and open space, participation from City Departments, especially the Recreation and Park Department, will be critical to its success.

3.2.1 Volunteer Coordinator and Staff Support

Support from the Volunteer Coordinator, management, and maintenance staff of the Recreation and Park Department (RPD) will be essential. RPD facilities and resources, including propagation and growing resources for providing plant materials and City Zoo resources for acquiring and propagating quail will also be required.

4.0 FOCUS ON HABITAT IMPROVEMENT

The continued survival of California quail in San Francisco's city parks is threatened primarily by loss of viable habitat and the absence of quail management. Therefore, this Plan focuses on habitat improvement and active management rather than predator control or restrictions on access and recreation.

4.1 Habitat Improvement

Habitat improvement is the cornerstone of the Quail Recovery Plan. To increase the extent of and improve the quality of quail habitat, the following actions are recommended:

- *Outreach to and organize a broad volunteer base*
- *Familiarize volunteers with the Quail Recovery Plan*
- *Outline a plan of action for the site to be improved*
- *Set specific goals and objectives*
- *Survey, map, and monitor the recovery site*

4.2 Habitat Requirements

In natural circumstances, California quail inhabit primarily chaparral, sagebrush scrub, and grassland oak habitats. However, they are adaptable and use riparian and foothill woodland as well as some agricultural land. The basic habitat requirements of quail also make them ecologically "preadapted" to properly managed park situations.

4.2.1 Mosaic Habitat and Edge

In general, the ideal quail habitat will consist of a broken mosaic of open feeding areas and shrub or woodland cover where the quantity of edge is maximized and where there is a reliable source of water nearby.

4.3 Habitat Design

There is no single formula for creating suitable quail habitat. Each area considered for habitat creation will vary, and so too will the proportions of the elements necessary to make an area suitable for quail. However, the basic elements remain the same.

The habitat requirements of California quail are best described by John T. Elmen Jr. and Ben Glading in "Increasing Valley Quail in California," Bulletin 695, University of California Berkeley, November 1945, and by A. Starker Leopold in "The California Quail" (U.C. Press 1977).

4.3.1 Cover

Providing cover is one of the critical elements of creating quail habitat. The needs of quail for cover or shelter may be listed under five types: 1) Loafing cover 2) Escape cover 3) Feeding cover 4) Roosting cover 5) Nesting cover. (See Elmen and Glading, 1945 for complete description.)

4.3.2 Food

The quail's diet consists mainly of seeds, leaves, and flowers from grasses, shrubs, and trees, but they will also eat berries, waste grain, catkins, plant galls, and insects. Their diet is rather adaptable and can also include non-native plant species and often varies seasonally. In terms of relative quantity, the quail's diet is typically 70% seeds and leaves of leguminous plants and annual grasses.

4.3.3 Water

To meet their watering needs in San Francisco, quail can take advantage of fog drip and horticultural watering as well as water from seeps, springs and creeks.

4.3.4 Plantings

Plantings to provide the essential elements of habitat for California quail can be quite varied. For the most part, structural diversity may be more important than the particular species planted. Quail plantings need not depend on native plantings, and many non-native plants are of value to quail. However, indigenous species may offer advantages and pest plant species should be avoided. (See Vegetation List)

5.0 HABITAT AND POPULATION ASSESSMENT

On-going assessments of existing and enhanced quail habitat and the quail population at recovery sites should be implemented as part of this plan.

5.1 Adaptive Management Approach

As part of the overall effort, regular habitat and population assessments will be conducted. The assessment work should be viewed as ongoing and not something that must be completed before any concrete restoration work can be accomplished.

The recovery effort is designed to be science-based, but not to be simply an exercise in collecting data. Rather, the data collection and assessment are designed to serve the restoration effort. To the extent that restoration efforts can be initiated, based on past experience, those efforts should be initiated as soon as practical. Assessment and restoration implementation are to be accomplished concurrently.

5.1.2 Survey Methods

A rigid survey protocol does not need to be adopted. The best way to collect the needed information will be to simply spend time doing walking surveys of known and potential quail habitat, recording relevant information as described in Section 4.0.

5.1.3 On-going Information Development

Some specific information to be gathered as part of the assessment should include:

- 1) Dominant plant species present in occupied sites.

- 2) Plant species favored by quail (could vary seasonally).
- 3) Dominant plant species present in apparently suitable but unoccupied sites.
- 4) Sources of water and their seasonal availability.
- 5) Factors contributing to why potentially suitable sites are unused.
- 6) Relative abundance of different vegetation cover types (e.g. grassland, lawn, shrubs, woodland/forest, bare ground etc.).
- 7) Estimates of numbers of quail at each site during breeding and non-breeding seasons.
- 8) Known breeding areas.
- 9) Estimates of the numbers of fledgling quail observed per pair.
- 10) Approximate home range of winter coveys and breeding pairs.
- 11) Sources of disturbance (particularly in breeding areas).
- 12) Suggestions for enhancement of sites.
- 13) Pesticides and herbicides used in vicinity of quail areas.

Data on the general extent and character of the habitats should be mapped. These maps can also be used to record the movements and activities of the quail.

5.2 QUAIL RECOVERY SITE TEAMS

Since all the initial Recovery Sites are under the control of the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department (RPD), the initial task will be for RPD to organize a Central Quail Team to implement this plan. This effort will require the full and early involvement of all park stakeholders.

5.2.1. . Site-Specific Teams

This Plan recognizes that there is a finite amount of human and financial resources that can be brought to expend on implementation at any given point. Therefore, the Central Quail Team should prioritize the Recovery Site(s) where effective implementation can begin in an expedited and effective manner. Once this has been done, site-specific teams for each Recovery site should be established and should include a mixture of City staff, volunteers, and stakeholders.

5.2.2. Site-Specific Team Tasks

The following are guidelines for steps to be taken by the restoration site teams.

- **Review the general and site-specific plans.** The Volunteer Coordinator and all team members must be familiar with, committed to, and governed by the cooperative principles and guidelines of the Quail Recovery Plan.
- **Develop a timeline for project implementation.** Setting a timeline with specific accomplishments to be met will keep the campaign on track and maintain enthusiasm.
- **Set specific restoration objectives.** Setting specific objectives and meeting them will ensure the campaign progresses and meetings do not become a drain on members' time and enthusiasm.
- **Survey, map, and monitor the quail habitat of the recovery area.**
 - ♣ **Key variables are:**
 - *Cover*
 - *Food*
 - *Water*
- **Survey, map, and monitor quail populations.**
 - ♣ **Key variables are:**
 - *Spring counts (May)*
 - *Winter counts (December)*
 - *Sighting locations*
- **Supplement quail populations when and where viable in consultation with the Golden Gate Audubon Society**

5.3 Reporting and Review

Because quail recovery is a citywide effort that includes many stakeholders, the Director of the Department of the Environment after receiving the input of interested parties shall present regular updates to the Commission on the Environment on progress towards implementing the quail habitat restoration plan.