

Bay Area

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Photos by Michelle Gachet / The Chronicle

The Lands End project is focused on habitat restoration, construction of a visitor center and improvement of the parking area.

RECREATION

Major upgrade at Lands End getting noticed

By Jessica Kwong
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

After visiting for a quarter of a century and living three blocks away for a decade, Kathleen Stern has grown to consider Lands End her backyard.

Still, she didn't feel comfortable walking through most parts alone.

"The trees were so thick that you weren't sure if there were homeless people camped out,"

Stern, 70, said. "It was not inviting."

That was several years ago. Since 2006, Lands End, a 110-acre portion of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area at the rugged northwest edge of San Francisco, has undergone restoration to reverse about 30 years of neglect.

Despite the area's natural beauty, the forest was overgrown, trails were narrow and

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Brendan Walsh works on construction at Lands End, a 110-acre portion of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

How to help

The park stewardship program meets Saturdays from 1 to 4 p.m. but volunteers are welcome at any time. Visit www.parksconservancy.org/volunteer or call (415) 561-3077.

To contribute donations, contact the conservancy at kmorelli@parksconservancy.org or (415) 561-3050.

Beautification award for upgrades at Lands End

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uneven, invasive plants had replaced native species and views of the Golden Gate Bridge and Marin Headlands were obscured, said Greg Moore, executive director of the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy.

"It wasn't made into the national treasure that it could be," he said. "So we created a vision working with the community to polish the jewel that Lands End was."

Now in the midst of the project's phase II — which includes continued habitat restoration, constructing a visitor center, upgrading the USS San Francisco Memorial parking area and creating an overlook at Eagle's Point — Lands End improvements are being noticed.

Tonight, Lands End will receive a 2010 Beautification Award from the nonprofit San Francisco Beautiful for the work that the U.S. National Park Service, conservancy, private donors and volunteers digging the dirt have accomplished together.

"It's a project of international significance, a national park visited by millions of people from all over the world," said Jim Chappell, executive director of San Francisco Beautiful.

Restoration has brought a "tremendous increase in visitation to the area," said Howard Levitt, director of communications and partnership for the recreation area.

And it isn't just locals.

"I hear French, German,



Michelle Gachet / The Chronicle

Kaveena Singh (left) and Munmeeth Soni walk along a Lands End trail at the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Chinese, out there on that trail," said Amy Meyer, who has lived within walking distance for 46 years.

Meyer, who wrote "New Guardians for the Golden Gate" about establishing the national park, is one of hundreds of volunteers who have acted as trail keepers, pulled weeds and planted more than 80,000 native species.

"It's a place you're proud to have people come, see, use and enjoy, and you feel good about it," she said.

Phase II is being paid for through \$5 million the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund granted in February. The bulk of the restoration costs have been contributed by the fund, which has given a total of \$8.6 million since 2004.

Construction is scheduled to end in 2012 but money for the volunteer stewardship program extends through 2014, according to John Skibbe, the conservancy's associate director of planning and design.

However, more money needs to be raised to make the remaining mile of trail handicapped accessible, said David Shaw, the conservancy's com-

munications director.

"Sometimes I have mixed emotions that this place a lot of us had to ourselves is being discovered," Stern said. "But on the other hand, I think it's wonderful that so many people get to see this corner of the city — it's just stunning."

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