FOREWORD

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This book records the important history of how land on the fringes of a rapidly growing urban area was saved for public use and enjoyment, instead of being developed for housing and commerce. It offers a lively and detailed account of the founding of a new national park on the extensive coastline and coastal lands north and south of San Francisco's Golden Gate.

Government necessarily played a major role in acquiring the land and regulating its use to establish the park, but governmental agencies first had to be motivated to act. *New Guardians for the Golden Gate* tells the story of people bonding together to enlighten and pressure the government to take the steps required to preserve this extraordinary landscape. Written by one of the movement's key figures, Amy Meyer, the book demonstrates how people in a democracy can organize to attain an end unlikely to occur without their intervention. It shows how public good can be achieved where market forces, so often blind to long-term needs, would have eradicated that potential.

Valuable as a "how-to" guide for those at the grassroots level who want to make a difference and achieve environmental ends, the book is also a riveting read, a tale complete with heroes and villains. From the author's viewpoint, of course, the heroes are the preservationists: local folk; activists with nonprofit organizations such as the Sierra Club and the Trust for Public Land; Representatives Phillip Burton, Nancy Pelosi, and William Mailliard; Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein; both the Nixon and Carter administrations; a few National Park Service officials; and private land owners who cooperated with those seeking to establish the park. The villains are a passel of land owners who could profit considerably from the spread of urbanization westward to the sea; James Watt, secretary of the interior during the Reagan years; and a number of congressmen who wanted to sell the Presidio off after the post was closed.

The book is a fascinating illustration of the dynamic nature of grassroots politics. We watch

public involvement in an early controversy on the use of a small parcel of federal land in San Francisco mushroom into a huge social movement for the preservation of some 80,000 scenic acres on the edge of the growing metropolitan region of the San Francisco Bay Area, together with 85 miles of the coast. We repeatedly see how political strategies must be formulated in the face of constantly changing circumstances and how success often depends on the right legislator being in a position of influence at the right time. Political savvy, we learn, is just as crucial for volunteer participants, and especially their leaders, as dedication to their cause.

I became involved with the Golden Gate National Parks in the 1990s, when I joined the Presidio Council. Congress had put the whole Presidio of San Francisco inside the national park boundary in 1972, anticipating that a future Congress might decide the nation no longer needed an Army post at the Golden Gate. I was one of a group of some thirty people who started planning the conversion of the post to civilian use as a park. The council's work led to congressional legislation to establish the Presidio Trust, an innovative form of park governance uniquely suited to the Presidio.

In 2000, when I returned to the Bay Area from Washington, the secretary of the interior asked me to represent him on the board of the Presidio Trust. For over two years I had the exhilarating experience of helping to conserve the Presidio as well as providing for the use, restoration, and maintenance of hundreds of structures on the site, nearly five hundred of which were on the National Register of Historic Places. One of our nation's most beautiful sites, the Presidio has been saved by congressional action, but its comprehensive transformation requires considerable private investment. The Trust has successfully shaped public-private partnerships, and the renewal of this historic place is more visible every month. The Presidio Trust's efforts now meld nearly seamlessly with those of the National Park Service.

It has been singularly rewarding to be part of the campaign for the Golden Gate National Parks, and to work with Amy Meyer and others who preserved these lands for all of us to enjoy.