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6. PARKS: Coast Guard wants to transfer historic lighthouses to Golden Gate park system

Arthur O'Donnell, *Land Letter* editor

SAN FRANCISCO -- The U.S. Coast Guard and National Park Service are considering making a transfer of five historic lighthouses, including the popular station at Alcatraz Island, to become part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA).

Although still in use as visual landmarks in and around often-foggy San Francisco Bay, the lighthouses have been supplanted by global positioning satellites and other modern technology that are much better suited to providing navigational guides for commercial ships and recreational boats.

"These are not really needed as aids to navigation anymore," said GGNRA spokesman Rich Weideman. "But they are historically quite significant and such iconic symbols. Lighthouses carry such romantic notions for people," he said, noting their role in historic lore about Pacific Ocean shipwrecks and as current day tourist attractions. "All five are within our legislated boundaries," he added.

The five lighthouses are:

- **Alcatraz Island Light**, on the site of the oldest operating light station on the West Coast, was originally established in 1854 but replaced with a taller 84-foot octagonal pyramid tower in 1909. As part of one of the Park Service's most popular attractions at the former federal prison, the Alcatraz Light has been hooked into the park's electric system for decades. Operations were automated in 1963.
- **Lime Point Light**, located beneath the north anchorage of Golden Gate Bridge, was first used as a fog signal in 1883, with the lighthouse facility constructed in 1900. The low level light, at 20 feet of elevation, is solar powered and has been automated since 1961.
- **Point Bonita Light**'s modern tower was built in 1903, replacing a station that was first commissioned in 1854 on an outcropping of rocks off the Marin headlands, west of the Golden Gate. Although the complex, which includes a half dozen historic buildings is currently open for tours by appointment, a suspension bridge linking the site to the mainland is in serious need of repairs, said Weideman. Replacing the bridge is expected to cost over \$1 million, he said.
- **Point Diablo** is a small automated signal set up in 1923, also located on the north side and west of the Golden Gate Bridge.
- **Point Montara Light** is a well-known landmark on the Pacific Ocean south of San Francisco, located on property partly run by the California State Parks Department. Dating back to 1875, the site also features a Victorian Gothic duplex used as a youth hostel and a modern 70-foot-tall tower activated in 1928. Its original Fresnel lens was donated to the San Mateo Historical Society when the light was automated in 1970 and is not part of a display at the College of Notre Dame in San Mateo.



The light tower at Alcatraz Island is already one of the National Park system's most recognized attractions. Now the Coast Guard hopes to transfer it and four other historic lighthouses to NPS management. Photo courtesy of NPS.

Of the five properties, Point Montara is probably in the best physical shape, Weideman said. Before deciding whether to take on the lighthouses, the Park Service will need to conduct a thorough environmental and safety review to take into consideration potential expenses for refurbishing the properties to make them more accessible to the general public.

Considerations will include use of lead paint and the presence of asbestos, which have been commonly found at former military facilities that are now incorporated in GGNRA. "We have 667 historic structures in GGNRA," Weideman added, not counting parts of the Presidio military complex. "We want them as part of the park; the challenge is financial and environmental," he said. "We have to look at the properties and see what shape they are in."

Possible economic assistance might come from the Golden Gate Conservancy, which raises money for restoration projects and operates bookstores and some concessions on park properties in the GGNRA. At this point the conservancy has not been brought into the possible transfer deal, said spokesman David Shaw.

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