Nature Exploration Area @ Heron’s Head Park

Final Design, August 12, 2021
The NEA will create a safe and welcoming space for child-led unstructured play and discovery in nature as well as team building challenges to complement existing EcoCenter programs. Part of the India Basin project that is transforming industrial spaces and underperforming existing parks into a unified network of inspirational open spaces. The proposed approx 12,000 sq.ft site is between the EcoCenter and the parking area.
EcoCenter staff and Greenager Program youth will oversee programming and maintenance.
The majority of the site area is currently enclosed by a fence, unprogrammed, and inaccessible to the public. As part of the project, the fencing will be removed.
The project will bring in new native plants to restore some of the damaged areas from the July 2020 fire.
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Wildlife and Habitat

Heron’s Head Park is one of the few wetlands on San Francisco’s shoreline, and is an example of restoration success attracting more than 100 bird species a year.

Youth and Community

The Port of SF and the SF Recreation and Parks Department have teamed up to offer hands-on education programs for youth and public participation opportunities for visitors of all ages.

The Greenager Program

Heron’s Head Park is also home to the Greenagers, youth stewards and leaders that play an important role in the community by improving the city’s green spaces and raising awareness on local issues.

What’s Important Today
Final Design 2021
Heron's Head Nature Exploration Area was designed and inspired by gathering input from local youth and community members. This natural play concept allows for active play, passive recreation, gathering with friends and family, and creates pockets of exploration to stimulate the senses and inspire imagination.
Large multi-stem native shrubs including:

+ Pacifica Wax myrtle
+ Ceanothus - Ray Hartman
+ Coyote Brush

Native plants concentrated around the lookout selected for play value, smells, colors and texture including:

+ San Francisco gumplant
+ Sticky monkeyflower
+ Douglas iris
+ Hummingbird sage
+ Yarrow
+ Coffeeberry
+ California mugwort
+ Soft rush
+ Yerba buena
+ California aster
+ Coast buckwheat
Boulders and locally sourced trees invite kids to jump, climb, and balance.
2 | EXPLORE
A combination of fixed natural elements and loose parts provide ever-changing challenges shaped and designed by kids.
Wacky posts of different sizes line the create-with-nature zone and provide opportunities to string hammocks or slack lines, or create nature forts.
GATHER

The path winds to the highest point of the site where logs form a circular gathering space to serve as an outdoor classroom and community gathering area. Surrounded by native vegetation, this is a great spot for quiet contemplation, for birdwatching, and for taking in views.
Shortcuts created with boulders and logs offer alternate routes or shortcuts to and from the overlook.
MATERIALS
Locally sourced and repurposed for nature play

- Boulder donated by CEMEX from Mt. Diablo quarry
- Tree repurposed from Lake Merced tree removal project by Arborist Now
- Hyper-local Native plants grown by Literacy for Environmental Justice (LEJ). Their nursery employs local teens and engages the community in the process of growing plants, restoring local habitats, and preserving the unique biodiversity of San Francisco.
- Downed park trees provided by the SF Recreation and Parks Department Forestry team with support from the Heavy Equipment Operations team.

Photo by L.E.J.
Welcome tunnel sourced locally and prepared for play by Arbor Upcycle / Arborist Now.

The shape and size of the tunnel would be very uncomfortable for an adult to lie in but great for kids to pass through and explore.
Design Process
To help design our new Nature Exploration Area, we reached out to some play experts for ideas and inspiration:

4/12 | Design Jam @ Joe Lee Rec Center
4/13 | Design Jam @ Garfield Center | video
4/14 | Design Jam @ Hunter’s View | video
4/24 | Design Jam @ Heron’s Head Park
5/12 | Design Jam @ Bayview YMCA

Learn more and see photos here>>
Timeline:

- April: Community Design
- Late May: Review Concept Design
- August: Design Finalized
- September: Construction (3-4 weeks)
- TBD: Community event to celebrate the new Nature Exploration Area

More info: [www.sfchildrennature.org/heronshead](http://www.sfchildrennature.org/heronshead)

Questions: maria.durana@sfgov.org
This kid-inspired Nature Exploration Area was made possible through the funding and volunteer power of the Kaiser Foundation, the San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department, the Port of San Francisco, KABOOM!, and this community.