

# The South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project

The largest wetlands restoration project on the West Coast of the U.S., the Project encompasses 15,100 acres of former salt ponds located around the south edge of San Francisco Bay bordering Silicon Valley. Its mission is to restore and enhance wetlands in South San Francisco Bay as habitat for federally endangered species and migratory birds while providing for flood management and wildlife-oriented public access and recreation.

## Project Partners



## Thanks to Project Supporters

Our Project's progress is due to the efforts of a broad array of supporters and partners, from those who have volunteered their labor as tour docents or at Save The Bay planting days, and to public and private organizations that have given funds or other much-needed support.

In 2012, construction work, Shoreline Study planning, and scientific efforts were supported by:

- Federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act stimulus funds provided through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Program
- U.S. Geological Survey
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. EPA
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife

- State of California Wildlife Conservation Board
- State Coastal Conservancy
- State Department Of Water Resources, Integrated Regional Water Management Program
- Alameda County Flood Control District
- Santa Clara Valley Water District
- City of San Jose Water Pollution Control Plant
- Resources Legacy Fund

In addition, the Project has benefited since its inception from major support from other organizations, including:

- The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
- The David and Lucile Packard Foundation
- The Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation
- The Goldman Fund
- The Resources Legacy Fund
- The Adobe Foundation Fund



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# South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project

February 2012 Annual Report

A yearly snapshot of Project milestones and assessment of progress toward meeting restoration, public access and flood management goals

JOHN BOURGEOIS  
 State Coastal Conservancy,  
 South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project Executive Project Manager



## DEAR FRIEND OF THE SOUTH BAY SALT POND RESTORATION,

It's been another busy year for the Project, as we move forward on our last pieces of Phase 1 construction while mapping out the second round of work in our 50-year endeavor to restore the Bay's southern fringes. This year's highlights:

- We completed construction to open more than a hundred acres to tidal marsh development.
- As nature takes over from our earth-movers to build mudflat and grow pickleweed, we moved forward on planning for our suite of Phase 2 projects. Their focus will be to even further jump-start salt marsh restoration. Our goal is to establish marshes early enough so they can keep pace with rising sea levels.
- While making restoration a priority, we continue to study and strategize on ways to provide the best habitat for the many bird species that use the man-made salt ponds we've inherited. We are committed to our original plan that we'll only restore wetlands on 50% of our 15,100 acres, until we are confident we can expand tidal marshes and maintain the suite of waterbirds currently using the ponds.

- Mud and sediment are key building blocks of marshes, as well as the adjacent uplands that marsh species can escape to. This year, we launched an effort to establish long-term arrangements to bring in soil we can use for habitat creation over the life of the Project.
- And, in this unpredictable policy and funding climate, we've begun conversations with Silicon Valley companies and leaders, to engage the private sector on key questions facing the Bay, its health and future. In these uncertain times, it's important that we are all speaking with the same voice on those important issues.
- Thanks go once again to all our partners, to area agencies, and to the stakeholders who help us craft a way forward that takes all interests into account.

See inside for a map, charts and more specifics on our progress.

Sincerely,  
 JOHN BOURGEOIS



# 2012 Year in Review



## Milestones

### Tidal Marsh Restoration

- 1 Earthmovers tore open levees at 130-acre Pond A17 to begin nature's salt marsh-building process.
- 2 We widened the opening to more than 1400 acres in Ponds A8, A5 and A7 to allow more Bay tides to flow in. Prior to 2012, only 1 of the 8 tidal gates were open, but this past year 3 were open from June to December. Scientists are watching the effects carefully; this area is contaminated with mercury from upstream mines, and our goal is to manage the ponds to protect animals from taking in harmful levels of methylmercury from the soil or water.

### Enhanced Ponds

- 3 Landowners have changed their strategy for managing nesting islands and managing water levels after seeing low nesting numbers this year at Ravenswood Pond SF2 islands. The surface of the islands had cracked, leaving fissures that chicks could fall in to. The Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge acquired an amphibious vehicle to accomplish regular island discing to prevent cracks.

### Public Access

- 4 More than 500 volunteers from Save The Bay completed their first full year of work at the Ravenswood complex, planting more than 4,900 native seedlings and pulled huge quantities of weeds. Save The Bay volunteers now help with habitat restoration at two of our three pond complexes.

### Flood Protection

- 5 The Project cannot breach additional levees at Alviso to create tidal marsh until flood protection levees are erected. The Congressionally authorized South San Francisco Bay Shoreline Study, a partnership of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, State Coastal Conservancy and the Santa Clara Valley Water District, is analyzing Alviso-area flood risk management options, as well as ecosystem restoration scenarios. In 2012, the Shoreline Study team, after hearing from a range of stakeholders tentatively selected Alviso-area levee alignments. An environmental analysis is now underway.

### Science & Adaptive Management

Under our adaptive management approach, findings from research inform future management decisions. Key findings from 2012 include:

- 6 Scientists report that sediments are rapidly building at the Duck's Head Pond (A6) that we breached in 2010. The layers of mud must rise to a certain height before vegetation can start to grow. Scientists say the pond's low, subsided level is the reason it is pulling in so much mud.
- Rather than many rigidly designed man-made nesting islands, scientists now understand that a scattering of some linear islands throughout the project may best serve breeding birds. In response to this advice, managers are looking at this approach for our next phase of construction.
  - Scientists saw a continuation of the steady rise in the California gull population, and gulls trying to reside on our newly built nesting islands near Menlo Park. This means we will continue hazing to keep this species away from sensitive shorebird habitats.



### Other News

- We heard from the public on our developing plans for Phase 2 projects, and refined the options.
- The East Bay Regional Park District joined our Project Management Team and will be represented by Assistant General Manager Bob Nisbet. We said farewell to Mendel Stewart, but welcomed Anne Morkill, the new head of the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

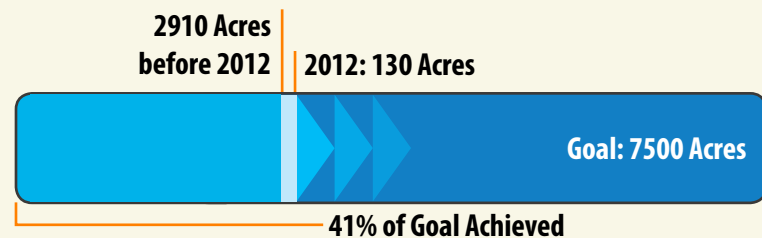


## Progress Toward Our 3 Goals

### Goal 1: Restore & Enhance Habitat

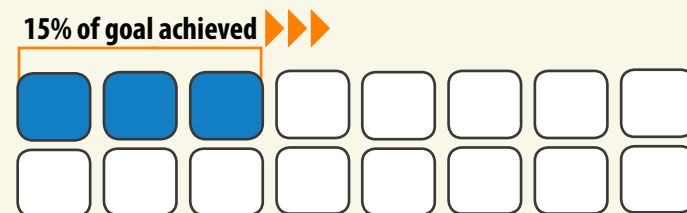
3040 Acres of Habitat Restored

In 2012, we opened another 130 acres to the Bay. Our initial goal is to restore half of our land, 7,500 acres, to tidal marsh, with the other 50% in managed ponds. With the 2012 action, the Project has accomplished slightly more than 40% of that goal.



### Designs Completed on 230 Acres of Enhanced Ponds

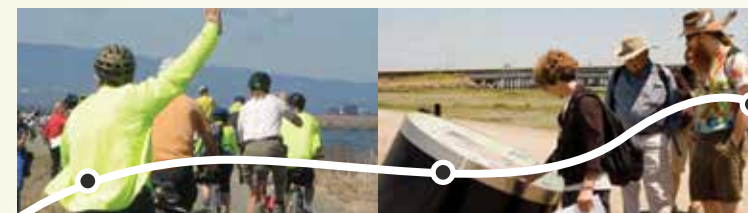
Project goals call for reconfiguring 1,600 acres of former salt ponds so they provide optimal habitat for a variety of shorebirds and waterbirds. The project has enhanced 240 pond acres, and is nearing the end of construction on 240 additional acres in Alviso. In 2012, we completed designs and hired construction crews to build a 230-acre multi-pond project at Eden Landing.



### Goal 2: Provide Public Access

Design of Kayak Launch and Saltworks Trails Completed

The Project has identified trails and other public improvements to build. The vision: establish an interrelated trail system; provide viewing and interpretation opportunities; create small watercraft launch points; and allow for waterfowl hunting. The project to date has created 2.9 trail miles. In 2012, design of an extensive trail network and kayak launch at Eden landing was completed.



### Goal 3: Provide Flood Risk Management

Flood Protection Progress Maintained

A goal of the Project is to provide for flood risk management, maintaining or improving existing flood protection levels. Project managers are committed to ensuring that flood hazards to adjacent communities and infrastructure do not increase as a result of the restoration. Tidal marsh restoration completed to date will increase scour and existing channels, thereby increasing flood flow capacity. Tidal marsh restoration in flood-critical parts of the Project area will not occur until inboard flood protection is established. In 2012, planning for new levees near Alviso proceeded.

