

Bay City News



SANTA CLARA CO.: FEINSTEIN TAKES PART IN RIBBON-CUTTING CEREMONY FOR HABITAT RESTORATION PROJECT

Sen. Dianne Feinstein joined state and federal officials at a ribbon-cutting ceremony Tuesday for the first completed habitat restoration and public trail of the South Bay Salt Ponds Restoration project near the Dumbarton Bridge. The completion of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's restoration and public access work at Pond SF2 is the first of many projects in the initial phase of the largest tidal wetland restoration project on the West Coast. The area, located on the southern edge of Dumbarton Bridge, features 237 acres of newly restored pond habitat as well as 30 large nesting islands for birds, a new trail, and two new interpretive viewing platforms for the public. The pond was previously filled with high salinity water used to manufacture salt.

Feinstein was instrumental in brokering the acquisition of the property in 2003 with the help of nearly \$100 million in state, federal and private funding. "The job is not done," she said. "This is a remarkable beginning. Now everybody must remain together. We must find the most cost-effective way to get the job done." And, she joked, "We must do it in the next 20 years."

The project aims to restore 15,100 acres of industrial salt ponds to a wetland ecosystem for people as well as resident birds, fish and other species that rely on the wetlands for nesting and resting, such as black-necked stilts and avocets. Sam Schuchat, executive officer of the California State Coastal Conservancy, said he expects thousands of shorebirds to use the pond in the fall.

Steve McCormick, president of the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, a project donor, said the pond "demonstrates a new precept for restoration." He said it contributes to the well-being not only of bird species, but of the millions of people who depend on the pond to improve water quality and absorb greenhouse gas emissions.

The pond is divided into three cells and is designed to allow project managers to control water depths for various species using the pond at different times of year. Two cells contain 30 nesting islands and are being managed for shallow-water foraging habitat. The third cell will remain dry in the summer and has been enhanced for snowy plovers. The other goals of the project are to provide wildlife-oriented public access and flood management.

Upcoming projects will focus on the installation of interpretive features at Bedwell Bayfront Park and the installation of a water control structure at Pond A8 near Alviso that will enable managers to open 1,400 acres of former salt ponds to tidal action next spring.

Also in the works are the launch of marsh restoration activities on 630 acres of former salt ponds at Eden Landing near Hayward; the planned levee breach of Pond A6 in October, which would restore an additional 360 acres of tidal marsh; and the Sept. 20 opening of a 2.2-mile "missing link" in the Bay Trail near Moffett Field.

The lands are managed by the California Department of Fish and Game as part of the Eden Landing Ecological Reserve, and by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as part of the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge.