



South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project



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Tide Gates Open on Historic San Francisco Bay Restoration

South Bay Restoration Project Conducts First Controlled Water Release

SUNNYVALE, CA, JULY 19, 2004 — Today the US Fish and Wildlife Service took an historic step in the management and restoration of the South Bay Salt Ponds by conducting the first release of waters from the former Cargill Salt Ponds into San Francisco Bay. In this initial lifting of the tide gates, 1,350 acres of salt ponds behind Moffett Field were —for the first time since the 1940's— opened to the Bay. The salt pond waters, in a controlled release, flowed into the Bay through three four-foot pipes during the low tide, for approximately an hour.

“Today’s controlled water release signals the beginning of the most ambitious tidal restoration project on the West Coast of North America,” noted US FWS California/Nevada Operations Manager Steve Thompson. By the end of this month, San Francisco Bay waters will circulate through 4,000 acres of salt ponds. Additional salt ponds will be opened to the Bay during the Spring of 2005.

“We are thrilled that scientifically sound efforts are underway to restore San Francisco Bay,” said Senator Dianne Feinstein. “Thanks to an outstanding public-private partnership, San Francisco Bay will be restored to a mosaic of functioning wetland habitats, managed cooperatively for wildlife, flood management and wildlife-oriented recreation by the California Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. We hope the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration will be a model for future restoration efforts across the nation, especially in highly populated urban areas.”

In 2003, 15,100 acres of South San Francisco Bay salt ponds were acquired from Cargill Salt in a negotiated agreement led by Senator Feinstein, in conjunction with federal and state agencies. Over the next few decades, these salt ponds, ringing the South Bay from Hayward in the East Bay to Menlo Park on the Peninsula, will be restored to a mix of tidal marsh, mudflat, managed ponds, and other wetland habitats. The project will also provide for wildlife-oriented public access and recreation and for flood management.

Opening these tide gates is the last step to halting the salt making process at this site and allowing the water in the ponds to begin taking on the same salinity as the Bay as outlined in the Initial Stewardship Plan. The Initial Stewardship Plan is designed to protect the existing habitat values of the acquired ponds and to manage the property so that it can be restored once the long-term restoration plan is completed in 2008. Additional tide gates are being installed by both the Department of Fish and Game and the US Fish and Wildlife Service at other sites throughout the south bay salt ponds as part of the Initial Stewardship Plan.

The long-term restoration planning process is being managed collaboratively by the California State Coastal Conservancy, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the California Department of Fish and Game.

Background information:

A century ago, the Bay Area contained almost 200,000 acres of tidal marshes and close to 100,000 acres of seasonal wetlands, creeks, and streams. Today, 90 percent of San Francisco Bay's original tidal marshes have been diked and filled for farming, grazing, salt extraction, building and other development. Despite its heavily modified current condition, the San Francisco Bay remains the largest and most ecologically important estuary on the U.S. Pacific Coast.

San Francisco Bay is a globally unique, yet threatened resource. Lands bordering the Bay are essential to the health of the region's fish and wildlife populations, as well as area residents. The Bay's wetlands filter toxic pollution and excess nutrient runoff. Restoring these lands will lead to the recovery of endangered fish and wildlife, improved water quality and increased flood protection.

The South Bay Salt Pond Restoration in terms of its scope and significance, is a truly historic project. A broad-based group has been formed to provide publicly-derived input that will help guide the process of restoring 15,100 acres of industrial salt ponds along the southern edge of San Francisco Bay. Its members include a wide spectrum of stakeholders from the scientific, business, residential, governmental policy, recreational, environmental and academic communities. For detailed information about the project, please visit www.southbayrestoration.org.

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