

**Applied Studies Question #18: Will public access features provide the recreation and access experiences visitors and the public want over short or long timescales?**

*Background/Rationale*

Project Objective #3 states that the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project will provide public access opportunities compatible with wildlife and habitat goals. A primary step in achieving this objective is to clearly understand the public's needs and wants for visitor access to the restoration area. The Project's land managers, US Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Game, allow a range of recreational activity on their lands including hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing, research, photography, environmental education, and interpretation. The Restoration Project is planning to provide a range of public access opportunities in its Phase 1 Project, such as hunting, non-motorized trails, kayak launches, interpretive stations at the Eden Landing salt works and other sites, and overlooks. Many recent studies of recreational pursuits show increased interest in some activities and declines in others. The 2001 report of National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation shows that by 2001 the popularity of these activities had increased from 1996 levels (US Department of the Interior 2003). In California, public survey polls conducted in 1987 showed that outdoor recreation was important to 44% of Californians. This percentage increased to 62% in 1997 (California Department of Parks and Recreation 2002).

In California, participation in all trail activities increased significantly in the last 15 years; bicycling doubled and hiking increased by 50% from 1987 to 1992 (California Department of Parks and Recreation 2002). California's population is expected to grow from its current level of 34 million to 45 million by 2020, further fueling the demand for recreational opportunities. California Department of Parks and Recreation (2002) reports that popular recreational activities of significance to the Restoration Project include recreational walking, driving for pleasure, trail hiking, general nature and wildlife study, bicycling on paved surfaces, visiting historic sites, attending outdoor cultural events, and picnicking at developed sites. Recreational trends show increasing interest in nature study and wildlife viewing, especially among two growing demographic groups, Hispanics and seniors, and a general continued interest in motorized recreation, such as "all terrain vehicles" (ATVs) and personal watercraft. Two traditional recreational uses, hunting and fishing, continue to decline in popularity.

While many questions about public access demand could be studied, two information gaps relative to the Project stand out:

1. What are the public access interests of San Francisco Bay Area residents and visitors?
2. Do the features that the Project provides meet the public's needs in the short and longterm?

At this point in the Project, we recommend specific hypotheses or research questions be designed to address these two questions.

*Study Design Concepts*

Both these questions could be addressed with well-designed public surveys. The two studies should use compatible data collection methods so that the data compliment each other. Some specific ideas on study designs for each question are as follows.

1. What are the public access interests of San Francisco Bay Area residents and visitors?

- Study Population: Regional scale needed. Sample the population south of the San Mateo Bridge, but could expand to the greater Bay area. Randomly sample overall population and recreationists; sample residents and tourists/visitors
- Study Sites: Recreational and non-recreational facilities
- Parameters Measured: Demographic parameters (age, ethnicity, residence, etc.); Types of recreation/public access engaged in, where and how often; Types of recreation/public access desired; Knowledge of restoration and the Project, in particular; Willingness to support restoration and associated public access
- Study Design: Survey administered to study population; stratified random sample design
- Time Frame for Study: Can be administered any time; a year or less of data collection should be adequate. Should be repeated every 5-10 years
- Estimated Study Cost: Could be undertaken by a qualified graduate student with direct involvement of major professor. Tentative cost estimate: \$30,000-50,000

2. Do the features that the Project provides meet the public's needs in the short and long-term?

- Study Population: Sample visitors to the Project's different public access features.
- Study Sites: Recreational and non-recreational facilities within the Project area
- Parameters Measured: Demographic parameters (age, ethnicity, residence, etc.); Project public access features used most often and why; Opinions of the public access provided by the Project; Types of recreation/public access desired; Types of recreation/public access engaged in, where and how often; Willingness to support restoration and associated public access
- Study Design: Survey administered to study population; include weekdays and weekends
- Time Frame for Study: Administer during Phase 1, after public access features have been available for at least a year; collect data over all four seasons and during weekdays, weekends and holidays. Should be repeated with each new Project phase and after major changes, of any sort, to existing phases.
- Estimated Study Cost: Could be undertaken by a qualified graduate student with direct involvement of major professor. Tentative cost estimate: \$30,000-50,000

*Management Options*

The results of the first study will provide specific and local information to the land managers on recreational trends and desires of Bay Area residents. This information should be used to adjust existing public access opportunities in the Project area and for designing valued public access features into future Project phases that *anticipates* demand.

The second study will give managers information on how visitors to the Project's public access amenities might use and view those features. Specifically, if some features are not

well used or of interest to the public, they might be converted to features that are attractive. Features that are popular should be increased, if wildlife impacts and funding make this possible. Of course, this information will be very valuable in designing the public access features of future phases.

The information collected by these studies must be acted upon in a *public manner*. If the public is happy with the access that the Project is providing, the Project should celebrate this achievement in public outreach tools, such as newsletters, the website, press releases, and the like. If the public seeks changes, the Project should make those public access changes if possible, based on wildlife needs, funding, etc.; if the changes are not possible, the PMT should make efforts, through meetings and public outreach tools, to explain why requested changes cannot be made. Public responses to people's needs and interests will promote support of the Project and for future phases. Not to address public access demands is to risk negative public sentiment that could prevent movement of the Project up the Adaptive Management staircase.

#### *Citations*

California Department of Parks and Recreation. 2002. California Outdoor Recreation Plan. 78 pp. The Resources Agency, Sacramento, CA. Retrieved from the internet on September 4, 2004. [http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page\\_id=796](http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp?page_id=796)

Trulio, L.A. 2005. Science Synthesis for Issue 9: Understanding the Effects of Public Access and Recreation on Wildlife and their Habitats in the Restoration Project Area. Report to the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, State Coastal Conservancy, Oakland, CA.

**URL: [www.southbayrestoration.org/Science.html](http://www.southbayrestoration.org/Science.html)**

U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S Department of Commerce,

U.S. Census Bureau. 2003. 2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-associated Recreation: California (revised). 86 pp. Retrieved from the internet on September 4, 2004. <http://www.census.gov/prod/www/abs/fishing.html>.