



To: South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project Team

From: Center for Collaborative Policy

Re: Outcomes from the July 11, 2007 Ravenswood Ponds Working Group Meeting

Background: The South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project held the first meeting of the Ravenswood Ponds Working Group (Working Group) on Wednesday, July 11, 2007 from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the Onetta M. Harris Community Center in Menlo Park. The Working Group is being convened to provide ongoing input and advice to the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project Management Team (PM Team) on Phase 1 restoration and public access implementation.

Meeting Attendance: Attachment 1 lists meeting participants.

Meeting Materials: In advance of the meeting, Working Group members were provided a meeting agenda. At the meeting, a draft Working Group charter and Phase 1 actions handouts were available, as well as a South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project brochure and FAQ document. Most presentations will be available on the SBSP Project website (www.southbayrestoration.org). Attachment 2 is the meeting's flip chart notes.

Substantive Meeting Outcomes:

1. Welcome and Self-Introductions

Mendel Stewart, Manager of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Complex, welcomed everyone and asked members of the new Working Group and other attendees to introduce themselves.

He discussed the purpose of the Working Group, to help managers make a better project. Project land owners and managers need Working Group members to give their ideas, to be critics, and to be advocates for the project.

He thanked those who submitted comments to the Project draft EIS/R, and explained that the purpose of this meeting was not to submit additional comments. Comments are now being reviewed. Instead, this meeting will get into more detail on the proposed Phase 1 actions described in the EIS/R. He also talked about adaptive management, noting that managers want to restore the Ravenswood Ponds to tidal marsh as much as possible, but that some managed ponds will have to remain to host bird species that use them for nesting.

He finished by noting that there will be another Ravenswood Working Group meeting, probably after the final EIS/R is out, but members are invited to communicate with project managers at any time.

2. *Work Group Charter*

Facilitator Austin McInerny from the Center for Collaborative Policy introduced the draft charter for the Working Group, which lays out its roles and responsibilities. He asked for feedback or suggested changes to the draft document. The charter provides the group with a mission and set of operating rules. It lists the group's purpose as a threefold: first, to serve as a forum for people who live, work and recreate in the area to provide collaborative dialogue on the project's Phase 1 actions; second, to consider solutions to rising sea levels in the South Bay; and third, to engage the broader public in the region and help project managers be creative in developing funding for the project. McInerny said membership is open to anyone who would be interested, and asked that members provide advice, talk with their peers, and bring back any relevant issues in a timely manner.

Questions/Concerns:

One questioner asked how feedback would be provided. McInerny said project managers want to hear about issues sooner rather than later. Comments can be submitted to the project website at www.southbayrestoration.org between meetings. Another questioner asked if the group is to have specific membership. McInery said the group has a more informal structure and is open to all, but there is a desire to have organizations consistently represented although individuals may change.

The group then supported the Charter.

3. *Schedule for SBSP Project*

Steve Ritchie, Executive Project Manager of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, presented a PowerPoint of the Project's schedule. Currently, the PM Team and consultants are working through 305 pages of 80 comments and questions to the draft EIS/R and expect to complete a final EIS/R by late summer or fall. Ritchie said the schedule then depends on to what extent those questions are answered. The intent is to obtain a Record of Decision and Permitting by early 2008. If that happens, Phase 1 implementation would occur over the next two years, and could potentially continue into 2010. Future actions and phases would occur over the next 30+ years.

Ritchie then explained the relationship between the Project and the South San Francisco Bay Shoreline Study now being conducted by the Army Corps of Engineers to evaluate if there is a federal interest in restoration and flood damage reduction and related purposes. A feasibility study for the Alviso Ponds and Santa Clara County area has started with local agencies – in order for the Corps of Engineers to undertake a study, there needs to be a local sponsor to provide a 50% cost share. It is hoped that study determines there is a project, which could then get Congressional authorization and possible federal funding. This study is important because the Fish and Wildlife Service, landowner of the refuge, doesn't generally get much funding to undertake habitat restoration. The Corps does get

money for restoration and flood protection projects, and has flood protection expertise. In the Ravenswood area, a local sponsor has not yet been identified for a study, but at some point, it will be necessary to start having a conversation about that.

Questions/Comments/Concerns:

One Working Group member noted that there is an ongoing Corps study of the San Francisquito Creek watershed. Ritchie said it will be important to make sure that all relevant areas are covered either by that study or the Shoreline Study. One questioner asked if there were any private landowners in the Ravenswood Ponds project area. Ritchie reviewed a map of the area, identifying parcels with ownership or easements other than the FWS. There are no individuals owning land in the Project area. One Working Group member mentioned the expansion boundary for the Refuge. Stewart said within this area, which he indicated on a map, the FWS has authorization from Congress to buy land from willing sellers in order to expand. The Working Group member noted that the basis for the boundary was wildlife and other resource needs, and the expansion boundary should be kept in mind as the Shoreline Study identifies restoration needs. There are 43,000 acres within the expansion boundary, and the refuge now owns about 29,200 acres of that. Stewart said many of the acres within the expansion boundary have been lost to development.

4. USFWS Compatibility Determination Process

Mendel Stewart gave a PowerPoint presentation on the mission and purposes of the National Wildlife Refuge System and the Don Edwards wildlife refuge. The USFWS is the property owner of the Ravenswood Ponds area, and its mission is “wildlife first.” The Don Edwards refuge will start creating a comprehensive conservation plan in 2008, which will include environmental analysis and public meetings. The refuge is supposed to provide opportunities for and encourage wildlife-dependent recreation uses, but this can only occur if they are compatible with wildlife purposes. Compatible means they will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the mission. Also, laws set out that all refuge lands are closed to the public until they are opened. In considering public uses, the refuge must also consider if the uses might conflict with each other, if sufficient funding and personnel are available to support them, and if the use is appropriate for a refuge.

5. Phase 1 Actions in Ravenswood

Mendel Stewart and Steve Ritchie presented the Project Phase 1 actions in Ravenswood, with the aid of PowerPoint slides and handouts.

Pond SF2 Restoration Actions:

The goal is to restore many Project ponds to tidal marsh, but to retain enough managed ponds, in the smallest footprint possible, to support birds that currently use managed ponds. Pond SF2 would be intensively managed for birds, through the addition of contour levees and nesting islands. The plan is to use SF2 as a pilot applied study for this type of intensively managed pond.

Questions:

Working Group members asked many questions about restoration plans for SF2. One questioner asked for more details about the nesting islands. Stewart said the islands would be surrounded by a few inches of water, brought in by gated culverts, to help protect birds from predators. The system would be gravity-operated. Islands had originally been built by salt companies to break wind fetch, and it was found that birds were attracted to them. One Working Group member noted that it's not immediately possible to make this area a tidal marsh, because of potential flooding problems. Stewart agreed that there are several areas, such as Highway 84 and University Ave, which need to be protected. Mary Selkirk of the Center for Collaborative Policy added that a marsh can't be established until a levee is built to protect those two areas.

One questioner asked if there is a concern that the birds won't like the site because of its proximity to the highway. Stewart said that is definitely a possibility. However, the proximity means that it is a great place to show people the project, because of the easy access to this pond. In response to another question, Stewart said vegetation will be managed to limit its coverage. There will be two tide gates, and it is hoped this will flush the water. From March through September/October, water will be kept on the site for nesting avocets, stilts and ducks. As far as vegetation management, Ritchie said this 242-acre site is a small pilot area. Among the candidate actions, managers could inundate the pond with salt water to kill off vegetation. There could be physical removal, or, while not desirable, the use of herbicides. In addition, Stewart said there won't be any levee breaching until non-native spartina is under control.

Selkirk said that applied studies the science team is designing for SF2 will examine whether birds will use the new configuration, and how they will be affected by a trail on two sides of the pond. Another study will look at cost-effective and feasible methods of vegetation management.

Another questioner asked what is happening in other ponds. Is there a master plan that some ponds will become tidal marsh? Stewart said yes, some areas around Bayfront Parkway would become tidal. The Phase 1 projects are projects that can be done now. The managers are holding off on projects that are more complicated, or that involve ponds that Cargill has not yet turned over. Ritchie noted, as discussed in the EIS/R, that the ultimate amount of tidal marsh will be from 50 to 90%, depending on how species respond.

PM Team members were asked about the long-term plans for SF2. Ritchie said the longer-term plan is to make the outer one third tidal marsh, as part of a goal to create a band of tidal marsh around the Bay. However, if SF2 is wildly successful with birds as managed ponds, that decision may be revisited. Managers are setting up the whole system to make decisions based on the data from applied studies. As far as a timeframe for the project, Ritchie said it's not specific, as it will be controlled by factors such as funding and species information. For example, project managers want to see the results of the San Francisquito Creek study. There may be other projects that will have funding as part

of mitigation requirements. The prediction is 10 to 15 years. Stewart noted that a Senate appropriations bill has allocated \$4 million for the SF2 Phase 1 actions.

Another questioner asked about bike access to the trails. Stewart said managers have not yet talked about the surface, but the assumption is it will be a packed, not paved, surface, for hiking access, about 10 feet wide. In many places, the FWS doesn't want a thoroughfare, but wants to draw people who are coming to view a national wildlife refuge. The questioner said that there will be a new bike lane on the Dumbarton Bridge, so bicyclists are going to be invited to take the trail as a way to avoid traffic along University. Stewart said the FWS has not yet determined if the trail use will be compatible with wildlife. Ritchie said the question of whether the access should be gated, so it is not through, is an open question that will have to be grappled with. Selkirk said this is exactly why this is a really good laboratory – that birds tend to move away from people, but it may be that birds there are already inured to noise from the highway, and that public access won't make any difference. The applied studies will need to test this question, and the goal is to establish some real data. One Working Group member noted that at one time, there was abundant wildlife – avocets and stilts – along busy University Avenue.

Concerns:

One member was concerned that the Project might have multiple objectives that are not sufficiently clarified – there is a long term objective to have a marsh band around the bay, but there will be a lot of money spent on the levee intake system, in the middle of the band. He was concerned that there was going to be a waste of money and 10-15 years because of inefficient construction, and the birds would not be served. Stewart said Senate Appropriations Committee representatives had the same questions, and seemed to be satisfied by project managers' argument that culverts last about 15 years, so that what the federal government is funding will be there for the life of the project – 15 years. The commenter said he was still concerned that adaptive management needs were taking precedence over the goal of developing the band of tidal marsh. Stewart said developing that band is not yet possible because it would cause flooding problems. Ritchie said it would cost \$30 million to build a flood protection levee, and at this point, that money is not available. Most of this parcel is to remain a managed pond. Another member said the project made sense to her, as it's a pond now, and with a little work it can be changed into a managed pond. The future tidal marsh objective requires a much larger change.

The commenter also opposed the use of herbicides on a national wildlife refuge. Another audience member said it's being used on spartina control right now, and some herbicides are very specific and don't affect animals.

Suggestions/Recommendations:

One Working Group member suggested that construction of islands and flooding, and introduction of public access, could be timed carefully to generate data. Ritchie said that that was a really good question and would be a good discussion during the design phase, which is just beginning. Potentially, everything would be constructed at the same time, but the public access could be gated off for a time.

One member noted that it will be important to coordinate with other projects in the vicinity – C/CAG (City/County Association of Governments of San Mateo County) is calling for major infrastructure improvements on University Avenue and Dumbarton by 2020, and there are the Dumbarton Rail project, plans for a future transit station on University Avenue, and the San Francisco Hetch Hetchy project. The Salt Ponds Project may be able to get a turnout, a viewpoint, a trail, etc.

One member suggested that, if managers want Working Group members to be up to speed, it might be worthwhile to post the applied studies for each Working Group on each group's page.

Feedback:

A mosquito district representative said as long as there is salt water from the bay coming in, and the site is relatively free of vegetation such as pickleweed, there shouldn't be a mosquito issue.

Pond SF2 and Bayfront Park Overlook Public Access Actions:

Elevated observation platform and interpretive signage would be erected in two spots along the levee trail at SF2. Another at-grade viewing platform and interpretive signage would be placed on the hillside at Bayfront Park, which is 40 feet above sea level, with a view east over Greco Island and Pond R4. Ritchie and Stewart said this is the single best viewpoint to explain the project from, as viewers see the pristine marshland of the island and the to-be-restored salt pond next to it. Project managers have ideas about the 40-by-40-foot platform design, but are interested in hearing what the community would like. Funding could possibly come from Caltrans for these Phase 1 actions.

Questions: One questioner asked how the Project is working with City of Menlo Park staff. Ritchie said he has met a couple of times with city staff and the goal is to put in place something that works for both the Refuge and the City. The discussion had been that the refuge will take responsibility for the platform and get an easement from Menlo Park. The parties will meet again once design sketches are complete to determine what will work for the city.

Concerns: One Working Group member noted that the Bayfront hillside trail is not the best. Stewart said the project might use an existing flat perimeter trail, part of the Bay Trail, to access the platform.

Suggestions/Recommendations: One Working Group member suggested putting up WebCams to view the clapper rails on the web. One could be put on a pole 100 feet away from the viewing platform. Stewart said this could be done.

Another suggested installing binoculars. Stewart said that is something that can be done, and mentioned that one viewing platform design being considered has wooden rails with curves to accommodate the elbows of people holding up binoculars.

One member suggested that the connector trail between the perimeter trail and the platform slope gently up the hill so it can be used by less able people.

Comments: Menlo Park staff are interested in the project and believe it is a great viewing location. The mechanics still need to be worked out, such as parking impacts.

As far as possible funding, one Working Group member said there is a focused Priority Conservation Area program, but it is really for acquisition of threatened areas. Applications are due next month, and Menlo Park is applying to be part of that program.

6. Outreach Opportunities for the Project

Any Working Group members who know of opportunities to communicate about the Restoration Project at local venues, such as community groups, churches, or local advisory bodies, can e-mail the Project's Public Outreach Coordinator, Tracy Grubbs, at t.grubbs@sbcglobal.net.

7. Next Steps

The PM Team thanked the Working Group members for attending, and for their good comments, suggestions and ideas. The next time the group meets, there will be design ideas to present. Ritchie said he was gratified to see new faces. One Working Group member suggested that continuing communication be fostered by starting an e-mail list to allow for two-way dialogue around Ravenswood issues.

The meeting was then adjourned.

**Attachment 1:
Ravenswood WG July 11, 2007 Meeting Attendance**

Name	Organization/Affiliation
Karim Al-Khafaji	Stanford Univ./Dept. of Biological Sc.
Nancy Borgeson	Friends of Bayfront Park
Patrycja Bossak	San Francisco Bay Trail
Lou Deziel	Menlo Park Planning Commission
Anthony Docto	City of East Palo Alto/Public Works
Stephanie Ellis	San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory
Carin High	CCCR
Yoriko Kishimoto	Palo Alto City Council
Jane Lavelle	SF Public Utilities Commission
Eileen McLaughlin	Wildlife Stewards
Kevin Murray	San Francisquito Creek JPA
Chindi Peavey, Ph.D.	San Mateo Co. Mosquito Abatement Dist.
Roger Potash	
Bob Power	Santa Clara Valley Audubon
Michael Reeves	Midpeninsula Regional Open Space Dist
Lennie Roberts	Committee for Green Foothills
Heyward Robinson	SRI & Menlo Park City Council
Douglas Scott	Menlo Park Environmental Commission
Duncan Simmons	Midpeninsula Regional Open Space Dist
Kent Steffens	City of Menlo Park
Kirsten Struve	City of San Jose/Envir. Services
Joe Teresi	City of Palo Alto/Public Works

Attachment 2: Flip Chart Notes Ravenswood Ponds Working Group

The following are public questions/comments captured at the Working Group's July 11, 2007 meeting.

Pond SF2

Will the pond be "muted"?

Why keep pond managed?

What water elevations will be maintained?

How are birds currently using islands & salt ponds?

How will vegetation be managed?

What are the seasons for keeping water in pond to prevent predation?

How will mosquitoes be managed?

How will adm studies be undertaken?

What is planned for the other ponds in Ravenswood?

What is the timeframe for future phases?

What coordination with Gateway 2020 and Dumbarton rail projects have occurred?

How will spartina be managed?

What is the sequencing of actions & public access features to learn whether or not access is affecting bird pops?

Will bicycles be allowed?

Will levee trail be opened all the way around pond?

How much data exists regarding nesting islands in other locations?

What are the project's objectives?

How is this interim Phase 1 project cost efficient?

Post applied studies (by workgroup/location)

Will Caltrans be on the hook for providing \$ for platform twice if levee is removed?

How about WebCams at various locations?

Suggest using binoculars at viewing platforms. Possible birdwatching assistance/wood armrests.

Bayfront Park

Would the trail be improved to allow better access?

How has the project been working with City of Menlo Park staff?

Need to solicit input from Menlo Park's park patrol on-site.

When will design be complete?

Does the available funding include viewing platforms (\$ from Congress)?

General Comments

Suggest Working Group point of contact/encourage group communication