

February 2006

Welcome to the tenth issue of the quarterly electronic newsletter of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project (SBSP). The restoration 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](#). The purpose of this newsletter is to provide you with a brief update on our effort to restore more than 15,000 acres of former commercial salt ponds in the South Bay which were purchased by state and federal agencies in March of 2003. For more detailed information about the restoration project please visit our web site at www.southbayrestoration.org. If you would like to unsubscribe from this quarterly update please contact tcorrigan@scc.ca.gov.

1. Stakeholder Forum Reaches Consensus on Restoration Alternatives



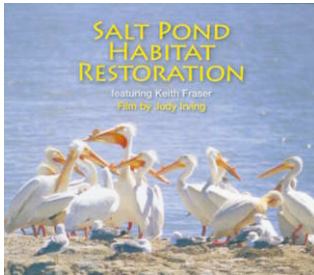
The project took a giant step forward in January when the 25-member Stakeholder Forum reached consensus on a three alternative scenarios for the restoration project. *Alternative A* represents the “no action” alternative which must be evaluated as part of the state and federal environmental review process. *Alternative B* examines what the South Bay will look like in fifty years if the project is restored to a ratio of 50 percent tidal wetland and 50 percent managed pond habitat. *Alternative C* examines the fifty year outlook if the area is restored to a ratio of 90 percent tidal wetland and 10 percent managed pond habitat.

Tidal wetlands, including marshes and mudflats, provide important environments for fish and birds and act as much-needed filters for the Bay. Managed ponds provide habitat for migrating shorebirds, offering important resting sites for hundreds of thousands of birds that migrate along the Pacific Flyway each year. *Alternatives B* and *C* represent two ends of a habitat range considered necessary to meet the Project objectives adopted in 2004. The optimal configuration of habitats will probably fall somewhere between these two bookends.

In addition to describing the long term scenario and the short term (or Phase I) actions for habitat restoration, each alternative also describes specific actions for the design and placement of recreation features including trails and interpretive stations as well as flood management actions including levee maintenance. Once the alternatives are finalized, they will serve as the basis for the formal environmental review process taking place this year. For more detailed information about the restoration alternatives please download the complete *Final Alternative Action Report* at <http://www.southbayrestoration.org/Alternatives.html>

Over the course of the implementation, which begins in 2008, project managers will continue to capture lessons learned on the ground and fold them into future management practices in order to achieve the best combination of habitat restoration, flood protection and public access at the project site. This practice, known as adaptive management, is critical to the long term success of the restoration project. The project's Science Team has completed a *Draft Adaptive Management Plan* for the project. You can read a copy by going to the documents page of the web site at <http://www.southbayrestoration.org/Documents.html#rr>.

2. Six Minute Video about the Project Now Available on the Project Web Site



A short film by award winning filmmaker Judy Irving is now available on the project web site. It is also being broadcast on local public television stations in San Francisco and San Jose. The six minute film introduces viewers to the salt pond restoration project and is narrated by Keith Fraser, a well-known local bait shop owner who has appeared on *Bay Area Backroads*. With his intimate knowledge of water birds and his expertise as a fisherman, Fraser is an enthusiastic and informed proponent of the salt pond restoration project. If you'd like to watch the film, please visit the project web site at www.southbayrestoration.org and click on the video link on the home page.

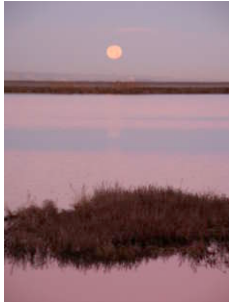
3. Army Corps of Engineers and Local Partners Host Regional Scoping Meeting for South Bay Shoreline Study



On January 25th, the Army Corps of Engineers, the State Coastal Conservancy, and the Santa Clara Valley Water District hosted a public “scoping” meeting for the first phase of the South San Francisco Bay Shoreline Study. The Shoreline Study is a Congressionally-authorized study to identify and recommend flood control, habitat restoration and public recreation projects for federal funding. The full Study covers a broader geographic area than the South Bay Salt Pond Project, but it provides an opportunity to secure federal funding to assist in implementing the Salt Pond

Project. The first Phase of the Shoreline Study focuses on Santa Clara County and the Alviso Pond area. At the meeting, participants listened to presentations about the scope of the Shoreline Study, the study's relationship to the South Bay Restoration Project and the next steps in the environmental review process. For more information about the Shoreline Study please visit <http://www.southbayshoreline.org>. A summary of questions and comments raised at the meeting (and by mail) will be posted to that web site later this month.

4. 2006 Calendar



This year the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project moves into the environmental evaluation phase of its planning effort. This phase will culminate with the release of a final Environmental Impact Report. The draft report will be available for public review later this year. While that report is being prepared, the Stakeholder Forum will continue to meet and provide important feedback on the long term governing and funding strategies for the restoration project. They will also be discussing important components of the South Bay Shoreline Study described above. Below is a draft timeline for 2006.

Stakeholder Forum meetings are open to the public and you are encouraged to attend and participate. This calendar is subject to change, for the latest information on upcoming meetings, please visit the project web site at www.southbayrestoration.org.

Draft 2006 Calendar	
March	Environmental Review Process: Launch environmental review of Restoration Alternatives
July	Stakeholder Forum Meeting: Discuss long term governance structure for the <i>Restoration Project</i> and habitat evaluation models for the <i>South Bay Shoreline Study</i>
October	Environmental Review Process: Draft Environmental Impact Report for the <i>Restoration Project</i> available for public review
October	Stakeholder Forum Meeting: Updates on environmental evaluation of <i>Restoration Project</i> alternatives and the flood modeling for the <i>South Bay Shoreline Study</i>

5. Record Numbers of Birds Continue to Flock to Low Salinity Ponds



This year marks the second year in a row that a great number of sandpipers, shovellers, ruddy ducks and Eurasian wigeons have returned to project site. They are taking advantage of thousands of acres of ponds that have been opened to tidal action under the guidance of the Initial Stewardship Plan (ISP). The

ISP is designed to reverse the salt making process and prepare the salt ponds for the first phase of restoration beginning in 2008. The return of so many migrating birds to these lower salinity ponds gives credence to the restoration (and baseball) mantra: if you build it they will come!

In addition to improving habitat for migrating species, US Fish and Wildlife Service and CA Department of Game managers have opened up several thousand new acres to hunting—one of the many public access and recreation activities that will be part of the final restoration project. This year marks the third and final phase of the Initial Stewardship Plan. Among other things, Project Managers are busy preparing to complete the circulation of bay water through North Creek and Old Alameda Creek near Eden Landing. They are also planning to complete a series of levee breaches in March and April which will open up the Island Ponds near Alviso to full tidal action.

For more detailed information about Initial Stewardship Plan activities please visit the ISP page on the project web site at www.southbayrestoration.org/ISPNews.html

6. Draft EIR Released for the Napa Plant Site



When state and federal agencies purchased the salt ponds from Cargill in 2003, the purchase included 15,100 acres of salt ponds in the South Bay and an additional 1,460 acres of salt production land in the North Bay known as the Napa Plant Site. The restoration planning process for the smaller Napa Plant site has been proceeding at a

slightly faster pace than that of the South Bay Salt Ponds. This month, project managers released the draft Environmental Impact Report for the Napa Plant Site. The report considers three alternatives for the restoration of the site and provides detail on the benefits to wildlife as well as the issues of known controversy including conflicts with local airport traffic, mosquito abatement control and impacts to water quality. For a complete copy of the draft report please visit the Napa Plant Site section of the web site at <http://www.southbayrestoration.org/Napa%20Plant.html>.

7. Restoring Salt Ponds in the North Bay: An Update on the Napa River Salt Marsh

When the South Bay Salt Pond Project breaks ground on restoration in 2008, the project will benefit from the experience gained in the North Bay at the 10,000 acre Napa River Salt Marsh restoration project. Purchased from Cargill in 1994, the Napa River Salt Marsh Restoration project launched the first phase of restoration in August 2005. This first phase will restore 3,000 acres of salt ponds along the Napa River to tidal habitats to support a wide variety of species including the California clapper rail and Dungeness crab. The project will also enhance 1,600 acres of existing ponds to improve habitat management capabilities for shorebirds and waterfowl. As an early

example of successful restoration in the Napa Marsh, pond 2A was opened to tidal influence in 1995 and is now restored to almost 100% vegetated tidal marsh. This year, the Wildlife Conservation Board and California Department of Fish and Game are working to open ponds 3, 4 and 5 to tidal action. Construction is scheduled for completion this Fall. The second phase of the Napa River Salt Marsh Restoration project will be implemented by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers beginning in 2007, contingent on authorization by Congress. The Corps will enhance another 2,000 acres of managed pond habitat, as well as dilute and discharge the bittern (a byproduct of salt production) stored in one pond.

8. Come Visit the Salt Ponds!



For those who would like a closer look at the restoration site, you have two great options. Wildlife Stewards and the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge continue to offer docent-led tours and slide presentations about the restoration project. Participants can view a thriving tidal marsh and visit a portion of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration site during a walking tour in Menlo

Park. Tours are free to the public and suitable for ages 12 years and older. For more information about the tours and/or to make a reservation, please call the Refuge Visitor Center at 510-792-0222. Group tours and indoor presentations are available upon request. Please call Carmen Minch at the number above.

Current Tour Schedule	
Saturdays 10 am to 12 pm	Sundays 2 pm to 4 pm
March 11	March 26
April 8	April 30
May 6	May 21

If you can't make it to the South Bay for a tour, but would like to get a virtual sense of the project, visit our interactive map on the project web site. The interactive nature of the map enables viewers to zoom out for a regional overview, or zoom in to inspect a particular pond, slough, or other feature. Detailed aerial photography is available as an optional backdrop. To reach the map, go to <http://www.southbayrestoration.org/interactivemap>

Photo Credits: Thank you to Rob Holt, Deborah Clark, Clyde Morris, Kent Steffens and Eileen McLaughlin for supplying photos for this issue of the newsletter.