



South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project



January 2007

Welcome to the thirteenth 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 (or to unsubscribe from this publication) please visit our web site at www.southbayrestoration.org.

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1. Stakeholder Forum Prepares For Next Planning Phase: Environmental Documents Slated for Early March

After more than two years of work, the Stakeholder Forum and the project management team are moving rapidly toward the next milestone in the restoration planning process: the release of the draft environmental documents in early March. The combined Draft Environmental Impact Report / Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) is a key step toward the launch of Phase One restoration activities in 2008.

The Draft EIR/EIS will detail the “stair step” approach to restoration that will slowly transform the landscape from a series of commercial salt ponds to a mixture of managed ponds and tidal wetlands. The document will also outline the impacts of Phase One activities including trail construction, levee removal and maintenance and wetland restoration. Newsletter subscribers will automatically receive information about how to obtain a copy of the Draft EIR/ EIS and the time and location of public workshops designed to discuss the draft. The calendar below describes the next milestones for the

project. For more information about upcoming public meetings, please visit the Events and Meetings Section of the project web site.

Draft Schedule

March 2007	Release of Public Draft EIR/EIS
Late Summer- Early Fall 2007	Final EIR/EIS
Fall 2007	Record of Decision and Permitting
Phase I Implementation	2008 and 2009
Phase II Implementation	The next 30 plus years



2. On the Ground: The Tides Return to Eden Landing, Birds & Fish Return to the Island Ponds!

In October, a small crowd gathered at the Eden Ecological Reserve to witness the latest in a series of carefully orchestrated levee breaches designed to connect barren former salt ponds to the dynamic tidal influence of the Bay. This particular breach marked a major milestone in the restoration of the Eden Landing Ecological Reserve. A portion of the Reserve (830 acres) was purchased in 1996—seven years prior to the acquisition of the 15,100-acre South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project. With the dramatic bite of an earthmover, Bay water from the North Creek channel rushed in to fill 300 acres of the former salt ponds. In a matter of hours, the dry ponds were transformed from a brittle moonscape to a wet tidal

environment that, over time, will support the kind of plant and animal life that once thrived in marshes around the Bay. The levee breach also set the stage for completion of a segment of the Bay Trail through Eden Landing in 2007. You can view news coverage and dramatic aerial footage of [the breach](#) at Eden Landing on the project web site.



Many of the changes taking place at the salt pond right now are part of the ongoing implementation of the Initial Stewardship Plan (ISP). The ISP guides the removal salt making operations and the preparation of the site for long-term restoration commencing in 2008. In March of this year, in cooperation with the Santa Clara Valley Water District, project managers breached the levees surrounding a set of three ponds known as the Island Ponds. Since that time, dramatic changes have taken place at the ponds. Before the levees were opened, salinities at the ponds were so high no fish could survive and only a few resting gulls were ever spotted on the water. Within one week of the first breach, American white pelicans, double crested cormorants, egrets and herons were found feeding on fish in the restored ponds.



To bring the bottoms of the restored ponds up to an elevation suitable for marsh plants, an additional one and a half feet of sediment needs to accumulate in the ponds. Natural sedimentation followed by extensive plant growth will result in full restoration to vegetated tidal marsh. Since March, scientists have measured several inches of bay mud accumulating on the

bottom of the ponds. Even with this limited amount of new sediment, native vegetation such as pickleweed and bulrush has started to grow. Shorebirds including least and western sandpipers, long-billed curlews and semipalmated plovers are feeding and resting in the ponds. As the season has progressed, large flocks of ducks have moved into the area. None of these species were ever seen on the ponds before they were restored.

Will the Island Ponds develop into fully restored tidal marshes within the next 15 years? It is still too early to say for sure, but all signs point toward success. In the mean time, we are astounded by the number and variety of wildlife species that have rushed in to make use of this new habitat.

3. Faces of the Restoration: An Interview with Duck Hunter Don Alvarado

A major goal of the Restoration project is to provide wildlife- oriented public access and recreation. In keeping with this goal, both the CA Department of Fish and Game and the US Fish and Wildlife Service currently offer a limited amount of hunting at the Eden Landing and Alviso pond complexes. As we move into the final weeks of this year's hunting season, we took time out to catch up with Don Alvarado. Don teaches school in San Jose and has been hunting in the South Bay since 1974.



Where do you go hunting?

In 1978 I started using a duck blind on pond A18 (which is now owned by the city of San Jose). In 1980 I moved to a duck blind on pond A3W and have been hunting there ever since. I also hunt in the Bay from my boat, which is moored in Alviso Slough.

How did you get started hunting?

I started hunting with my grandfather when I was young. We hunted in San Pablo Bay near Hamilton Air Force Base. Over the years I have been a member of a lot of different duck hunting clubs from here to Los Banos. I am a member of Ducks Unlimited, Delta Waterfowl, and I'm a life member of the California Waterfowl Association and believe strongly in their efforts to restore wetland habitats.

What do you like about hunting at the South Bay Salt Ponds?

I like the solitude. Pond A 3W has been a favorite place to go for many years. It's quiet and the blinds are spread out so there is not a lot of pressure from other hunters. I like the way Eric Murz manages the program. Hunters sign up for a particular blind so you know what your getting at the beginning of the hunt day.

I also like the convenience. I live in the Willow Glen section of San Jose and I can go from standing at my front door to standing at the ponds with my gun and decoys unpacked in about an hour.

Who do you hunt with?

I usually just hunt with my dog. Sometimes I'll take people out with, but I'm from the old, Italian school of hunters that keep the results of a hunt to themselves. I like it that way.

Over the years, what kind of changes have you witnessed at the ponds?

Every year is different. In the past, we have had a 4-duck limit as opposed to the current 7-duck limit. Overall the South Bay tends to attract an impressive number of ducks.

I've noticed that since the Refuge has been managing the property, and the water in the ponds has become less saline, the ducks really like to stay in the ponds as opposed to moving out into the Bay. Although the Refuge has limited the number of days people can hunt, they seemed to have leveled the playing field a bit. When Cargill and Leslie Salt owned the property hunters had to purchase a lease from a private lease-holder. Although we were happy with our arrangement, a lot of hunters were concerned about the prices they were paying. The Refuge also allows hunting from one of the levee roads, which makes it easier for people who don't want to deal with decoys and dogs to get out there. I've also noticed after they closed the public boat ramp in Alviso that there are fewer hunters in the Bay and more hunters at the ponds.

How often do you get out to hunt?

Last year I hunted about 25 times at the ponds. I keep pretty good records about these trips. When I have a young dog that needs to be trained I like to get out more often. I love it out there. Sometimes, I just tell my wife, I have to go, I have to train the dog!

To learn more about hunting opportunities at the salt ponds please visit the [Events and Meetings](#) Section of the web site.

4. Putting It All Together—How Will We Fund the Restoration?

As we look forward to the first phase of restoration commencing in 2008, project managers are considering a variety of different funding sources. In November the Stakeholder Forum met to review the current distribution of funding sources and to help identify ways to fill funding gaps. This is the second in a continuing series of articles reviewing each of the potential funding sources. In this issue we examine Federal Budget Allocations.

Federal Budget Allocations fall into two basic categories—annual allocations from federal agencies that can pay for specific elements of the restoration and one-time large allocations from federal programs that usually require some kind of state or local matching funds. To date the project has received federal funds from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Geological Survey, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. These funds have been used to cover the costs of construction and management of the property during the Initial Stewardship Phase, scientific sampling and monitoring of wildlife and tidal data and the development of the long-term restoration plan and flood management plan. Project managers will be going back to FWS, USGS, and NOAA to request money to help pay for the cost of implementing projects during Phase I of the restoration (2008 & 2009). The construction cost for Phase I is estimated to be \$25 to \$30 million with an additional \$2 to \$3 million needed annually to support monitoring and adaptive management activities. You can view a map of the [Phase I activities](#) on the project web site.

The project is also working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to develop a Feasibility Study that will recommend the authorization of federal funds under a future Water Resource Development Act (WRDA). Although it is a lengthy planning and approval process, a WRDA authorization, followed by annual appropriations to the Corps

to implement the project, could help pay for a large portion of the project's flood control, restoration, and recreational features. For more information about this process see the South Bay Shoreline Study article below.



5. South Bay Shoreline Study Update

The South San Francisco Bay Shoreline Study is a joint effort sponsored by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the California Coastal Conservancy and the Santa Clara Valley Water District. The purpose of the Shoreline Study is to develop a flood damage reduction and ecosystem restoration project in the South Bay suitable for Congressional

authorization and funding.

In addition to the agencies mentioned above, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other land-owning agencies within the project area also are also involved in the planning process. The Shoreline Study is being conducted in tandem with the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration project and will incorporate findings from the Restoration Project into its recommendations. The study will consist of a series of Interim Feasibility Studies, the first of which will investigate flood protection for Santa Clara County baylands, from Palo Alto to Alviso. In addition, the Shoreline Study will consider funding for the restoration of former salt production ponds within the Alviso Pond complex and adjacent properties such as areas around Moffett Field.

The reconnaissance phase of the Shoreline Study was completed in 2004 and the sponsors signed a cost sharing agreement in 2005. The next step in the development of the Shoreline Study is the completion of the "Without Project Conditions" Report, which will provide more detailed information about flood risks and levee conditions. This report will be completed in early 2008. The entire Shoreline Study, which is dependent on federal appropriations, is slated for completion in 2010. For more information about the South Bay Shoreline Study please visit the [Shoreline Study Web Site](#).



6. How to Learn More and Get Involved

a. Take a docent-led walking tour: 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 a complete schedule of upcoming tours and presentations, please visit the Events and Meetings section of the project web site <http://www.southbayrestoration.org/Events.html>

b. Watch the video: A short film by award winning filmmaker Judy Irving is now available on the project web site. The six- minute film introduces viewers to the salt pond restoration project and is narrated by Keith Fraser. The web site also includes video news coverage of recent restoration actions at the site. To view the footage go to <http://www.southbayrestoration.org/videoaudio.html>

c. Listen to the podcast: The project has produced two short podcasts about the project that include interviews with Executive Project Director Steve Ritchie. To listen to or download the podcasts go to <http://www.southbayrestoration.org/videoaudio.html>. For additional podcasts about Bay restoration, visit http://www.yourwetlands.org/wetland_tours_podcasts.html.

c. Visit the interactive map: 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 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>

d. Attend a Stakeholder Forum Meeting The 32-member Stakeholder Forum has been meeting for the past two and a half years to provide feedback on the habitat, recreation and flood management aspects of the restoration plan. All of their meetings are open to the public and you are welcome and encouraged to attend. For details on the next Stakeholder Forum meeting or to read minutes from previous meetings please check the Event and Meetings section of the Project Web Site at <http://www.southbayrestoration.org/Events.html>

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