



South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project

Restoring the Wild Heart of the South Bay

January 2010

Welcome to the twenty-first issue of the quarterly electronic newsletter of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project (SBSP). The restoration process is managed collaboratively by the [California State Coastal Conservancy](#), the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#), and the [California Department of Fish and Game](#). This newsletter provides 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. Public Participation Resumes



After an eight month hiatus brought on by California's fiscal crisis, public participation at the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project resumed in the fall of 2009 with three different public meetings. The Project's Stakeholder Forum and the Working Groups for the Eden Landing and Ravenswood Pond Complexes met with Project staff and consultants to review progress and provide feedback on design issues.

In November, members of the Ravenswood Work Group braved cold and stormy skies to tour the project site and discuss the construction schedule at Pond SF-2. Progress at these ponds near the Dumbarton Bridge continues with the enhancement of 240 acres of pond habitat for ducks, shorebirds and plovers.

Also in November, the Eden Landing Working Group met to provide feedback on designs for the kayak launch and viewing platforms at Eden Landing. The Group also discussed the schedule for restoring 630 acres of ponds to tidal habitat—a project that is slated to start construction in the Spring of this year. The Alviso Working Group is waiting to meet until later this year when the first set of flood maps will be released by the South Bay Shoreline Study. For more detail on progress at each of the pond complexes, please visit the [Track Our Progress](#) page of the web site.

2. On The Ground: Construction at the Ravenswood Ponds, Groundbreaking at the Alviso Ponds, and the Wonder of the Island Ponds

The project continues to move forward this winter with two important construction projects and new images of restoration progress at the Island Ponds.



Construction at the Ravenswood Ponds The most visible of the restoration construction work is taking place at the Pond SF-2 near the western approach to the Dumbarton Bridge. Construction crews have been hard at work reconfiguring this former salt pond to 237 acres of high quality nesting and shallow water foraging habitat for shorebirds, plovers and ducks. In addition to installing water control structures and a water circulation system, contractors are constructing 30 nesting islands. The work will be completed by August of this year.



Groundbreaking at the Alviso Ponds Earlier this month, a small crowd gathered for a groundbreaking ceremony at Pond A8 near Alviso. When the work at A8 is completed, this former salt pond will be connected to the tidal waters of Alviso Slough, creating 1,400 acres of open water habitat for a variety of species, including fish, pelicans, cormorants and ducks. Depending on the outcome of contaminant and levee scour monitoring, the pond will eventually become salt marsh, creating habitat for the endangered California clapper rail, the salt marsh harvest mouse, and other marsh species. The project will also generate significant construction related employment in the South Bay.



The Wonder of the Island Ponds The Island Ponds, which were the first set of ponds to be restored to full tidal action, provide a window into what the future may hold for the rest of the Restoration Project. Since the levees around these ponds near Fremont were breached in March of 2006, the ponds have continued to accumulate sediment at a rapid rate. Now pickleweed is beginning to colonize the newly formed mudflats. The photos above show the dramatic difference between April of 2008 and September of 2009.

3. Staff Changes at the Restoration Project



This year we welcome John Bourgeois as the new Executive Project Manager for the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project. John brings over 15 years of experience working on large-scale wetland restoration projects to the job. For the past 11 years he has been a restoration ecologist with the Los Gatos-based ecological consulting firm H.T. Harvey and Associates. John is well acquainted with the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, having worked on the initial planning phase of the restoration as well as other related projects including the Bair Island Restoration Plan, the Alameda Flood Control Channel experimental dredging program and the

Alviso Slough Restoration Project.

John replaces Steve Ritchie who left the Salt Pond Restoration Project last November to apply his talents at the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC). We can't thank Steve enough for masterfully shepherding the project through four years of planning and development and almost two years of implementation. The project has benefited tremendously from Steve's clear vision and leadership and his easy laugh, particularly in the face of new challenges.

John is joined this year by Len Cardoza who has been selected to serve as the Project Manager for the related South San Francisco Bay Shoreline Study (see article below). John and Len will work together to continue guiding and managing the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project as we complete Phase I of the restoration and move into Phase II in the coming years.

4. Visit the Ponds

Winter is wonderful time to visit the ponds. You can plan your own trip to the project area by using the [Visit the Ponds](#) page of the project web site, or take advantage of one of the many guided programs offered by the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay Wildlife Refuge below. **Please RSVP to Jennifer Heroux at 408-262-5513 x 106** to participate in any of the activities listed here.

Winter Tours and Programs at the Salt Ponds		
Program	Date	Time
Birding Clinic: Alviso	Saturday, January 30, 2010	9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
	Saturday, February 13, 2010	9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.
Ravenswood Hike: Menlo Park	Saturday, February 20, 2010	10:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

5. Science Update: Results of First Phase of Mercury Study Are In



Since its inception, the Restoration Project has been concerned about Mercury from historical mining operations and other sources that has settled in the ponds and sloughs adjacent to the mouth of the Guadalupe River. While biologically active systems like tidal marshes have the potential to create bioavailable mercury, no one knows exactly what kinds of conditions increase the likelihood that the toxic element will move through the environment. In order to better understand how restoration efforts might affect this legacy mercury, the South Baylands

Mercury Project began in 2006 and continued through the end of 2008. The project is a collaborative effort between the San Francisco Estuary Institute, United States Geological Survey in Menlo Park, and the Santa Clara Valley Water District to characterize mercury in the sediment, water, and biota of the Alviso pond and slough complex, as well as the southern portion of San Francisco Bay.

Researchers collected sediment and water samples throughout the Alviso and South San Francisco Bay region. They also collected tissue samples from several different species (fish, flies and birds), called “biosentinels”, and analyzed them for mercury content. Together, these samples begin to paint a picture of how mercury in sediment and water moves through the food web of these ponds and sloughs. The samples also enable researchers to determine if mercury concentrations are high enough to potentially have adverse affects on wildlife. While not all aspects of mercury movement in the South Bay environment is completely understood, we do know that just because a particular habitat contains sediments with a high mercury content, that does not necessarily mean that high levels of mercury will be taken up by fish and wildlife; complex chemical and physical processes control the uptake of mercury by living things.

The study found that biosentinels living in the tidal marshes in the South Bay had mercury levels similar to biosentinels in other parts of the South Bay. This provides an important baseline for the Project as we monitor the movement of mercury through the system over time. We are interested in understanding if the planned erosion of Alviso Slough (with the breaching of Ponds A6 and A8) is likely to increase the amount of mercury in wildlife, as represented by the biosentinels. The short answer is “maybe”. In the short term, the scour of Alviso slough is likely to mobilize the mercury that is currently buried deep in the sediments of the slough, although the exact amount depends on how much sediment erodes. No one knows where exactly the legacy mercury is expected to move to, and over what timeframe. The report recommends monitoring the movement of mercury in biosentinels. With respect to Pond A8, which has some of the highest concentrations mercury of any of the South Bay ponds, this study indicates that conversion of Pond A8 to tidal marsh would not be expected to increase mercury accumulation in the food web of the pond. The final South Baylands Mercury Project report is expected out sometime in the beginning of 2010 – watch the [Science](#) page of the website for its release!

6. Faces of the Restoration: Carol Severin



When it comes to outdoor recreation planning, Stakeholder Forum Member Carol Severin is one of the more knowledgeable leaders in the field. Since 1994, Carol has served on the Board of the East Bay Parks District. The District is the largest regional park district in the nation, spanning more than 100,000 acres with 65 parks and over 1,100 miles of trails. In addition, Carol just completed a 14 -year tenure as a Board Member of the Hayward Area Recreation and Park District. She also recently retired as a tenured Associate Professor at San Francisco State University. Carol lives in Castro Valley and has served on the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Stakeholder Forum since it was created in 2004.

1. You’ve had a long career in recreation planning and management. What drew you to this field in the first place?

I was raised in a very small town at the foot of the Cascade Mountains in Washington state, and I’d always enjoyed outdoor adventures as well as music, individual sports and arts. It was the late 1940’s and Washington State University was offering a new major in recreation leadership that seemed like a good fit to me. Summers found me working at Yellowstone Park, Lake

Tahoe and as a recreation leader for San Mateo. The Bay Area appealed to me since there were so many opportunities in the recreation field here.

2. *What types of courses did you teach at San Francisco State?*

I taught a variety of courses including recreation for the handicapped, recreation music, program planning, winter camping, tourism classes and arts and crafts.

3. *Winter camping, does that mean you know how to build a snow cave?*

Yes! We would go the Sierra three times a year to teach students skiing and winter survival skills.

4. *Any tips?*

Well, we had a great instructor who lived up there year round and he always insisted that the best way to stay warm in a snow cave was to take all of your clothes off and huddle with the other campers. It was the sixties.

3. *As a Board member of both the East Bay Parks District and the Hayward Area Recreation and Parks District you have a lot of experience with recreational challenges and opportunities facing the Bay Area. What do you think are some of the greatest challenges?*

I think the acquisition and preservation of open space in an urban setting is paramount. It's also important to make outdoor experiences available to everyone. The challenge here is real estate. We figure in a few years there will not be any land available for new parks where people need them and if we don't act now we will lose out.

And the greatest opportunities?

I think we have great opportunities now to teach the value of being close to nature and to help people develop a love for the land and the waterways. The East Bay Parks District has six interpretive centers and we offer programs to schools, we also have a working farm at Ardenwood. We provide free transportation to school kids to help get them out to the parks and the shoreline. All of this is incredibly important.

4. *What role do you think the Salt Pond Restoration Project can play in meeting the recreational needs of the Bay Area.*

There are so many great potential recreational benefits at the salt ponds including Bay shore walks with fabulous views, interpretive panels, and programs to teach children and adults about the history of the Bay. I have to say I think it's the "Wow!" factor that will keep people coming back. I'm always amazed when I do field trips at the ponds and along the shoreline. The views are amazing, there is really nothing else like it.

5. *When you are not attending planning meetings or teaching, what do you to recreate?*

I enjoy photography, walks in the park, landscape watercolor painting, music, board games and jewelry design. I would love to get back into sailing on the Bay—we don't have a boat right now but we once did.

6. *Do you have a favorite place to recreate on or near the Bay?*

Any park with a view.

7. Shoreline Study Update: New Project Manager, Floodplain Maps Due this Spring.

The South San Francisco Bay Shoreline Study is a Congressionally-authorized study to identify and recommend projects for federal funding. The projects may include flood damage reduction, ecosystem restoration and related purposes such as public access. If successful, the Study will provide critical funding for Phase II of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration (SBSP) Project.

This year the Shoreline Study is excited to announce the selection of Len Cardoza as its new Project Manager. Len's position was created at the end of last year following Steve Ritchie's departure as Executive Project Manager for the SBSP Project. Len's job will be to focus on moving the Shoreline Study forward and coordinating with the Restoration Project's new Executive Project Manger John Bourgeois. Len has over 35 years of experience funding, planning and supervising major programs and projects related to watershed management. Currently with WESTON Solutions Inc., Len was with the Port of Oakland for 12 years and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for 20 years.

In the spring of 2010, the Shoreline Study plans to unveil floodplain maps of the South Bay. These maps will document the flood risk that would occur in the far South Bay if neither flood protection nor habitat restoration measures – beyond those planned for SBSP Project Phase I were implemented.

Produced by a team led by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), these maps will be based on detailed analysis and numeric modeling that synthesizes a staggering array of variables to define the extent of the problem.

The maps will show both the near-term risk and long-term risk (50 years from now), if no project beyond SBSP Phase I were constructed. The long-term maps will also factor in sea level rise projections. The maps will be used as a baseline for determining the benefits that could be realized with implementation of further work beyond SBSP Phase I were implemented, and will be used to assess the cost effectiveness of federal investment by the Corps in implementing flood risk management and ecosystem restoration measures in northern Santa Clara and southern Alameda Counties.

Along with the Corps, the California State Coastal Conservancy and the Santa Clara Valley Water District, co-sponsors of the study, are looking forward to discussing the maps with stakeholders later this year. For more information, please see the study's website at www.southbayshoreline.org .

Photo Credits: Judy Irving, Chris Benton, Tracy Grubbs, and Eric Mruz.