



South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project

Restoring the Wild Heart of the South Bay

August 2009

Welcome to the 20th 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. Restoration Construction Begins at the Ponds

After five years of planning and permitting, backhoes and construction crews are now busy at the Salt Ponds, creating habitat and new public access as part of the Project's Phase 1 implementation. Construction launched in March at Ravenswood Pond SF2 at the west end of the Dumbarton Bridge. Workers are digging trenches, laying pipes and pouring concrete to create drainage to the Bay, as the pond is

transformed from a salty moonscape to 240 acres of high-quality shorebird habitat: a 155-acre shallow-water foraging pond and 30 nesting islands, plus 85 acres of snowy plover habitat.

Crews will build 0.7 miles of graveled trail and two viewing platforms along the Bay's edge. The pond is expected to be ready for birds in August of 2010. The public access will be open to strolling viewers after the birds have had a chance to establish themselves.



Construction crews were able to begin after the Project secured the last of its necessary federal, state and regional approvals in January, 2009. The SF2 project is one of 12 habitat restoration and public access construction projects that are taking place during the four years of Phase 1.

These projects, in total, will create the environmental benefits of 960 acres of new tidal marsh, 1,400 acres of managed tidal ponds and 709 acres of enhanced pond habitat for shorebirds and waterfowl. In addition, crews will build or open 6.7 miles

of new trails and, at Eden Landing near Hayward, construct a kayak launch.

This fall, the Santa Clara Valley Water District is expected to begin work at one of the Alviso ponds near San Jose, turning former salt pond A8 into shallow water habitat for pelicans, cormorants and ducks. A 2.2-mile section of the Bay Trail that will connect Sunnyvale and Mountain View will be opened once one last slice of property is transferred to the government form Cargill. At Eden Landing, design work is nearly complete on a 630-acre tidal marsh restoration, and work is expected to start in February 2010.

These four years of projects, summarized in a table on the next page, are the first round of several decades of restoration and public amenities work that will complete the Project. To view [detailed maps of Phase 1 restoration activities](#) for each of the three pond complexes, please visit the project web site.

2. Other Happenings at the Ponds: Public Input Opportunities, New Refuge Manager

The 30-member Stakeholder Forum will review recent Phase 1 construction and scientific activity when it meets September 16th in San Jose. Forum members represent a wide array of stakeholders including conservation organizations, local community groups, business leaders and elected officials. Other items on the agenda include a discussion of mercury issues and snowy plover habitat, as well as an update on the South San Francisco Bay Shoreline Study.



Meetings of the Project's three geographic Working Groups are also in the planning stages, including a meeting of the Eden Landing Working Group this fall to review designs of trails, platforms and the kayak launch before they are finalized.

In other Salt Ponds news, Eric Mruz in January was named Refuge Manager at the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, filling the shoes of Clyde Morris, who retired in early 2008. Eric, a biologist, previously managed the Alviso ponds portion of the Refuge, a position

he held for more than four years. To the left, you see him holding one of our resident endangered salt marsh harvest mice found during a survey at the Refuge’s “mouse pasture” near Fremont. The 30,000-acre refuge is the largest of the National Wildlife Refuges around San Francisco Bay.

Salt Pond Project Phase 1, 2008 – 2012	
Ravenswood Pond Complex	
	Enhance 240 acres of ponds for nesting and resting shorebirds and snowy plovers. (2009-10)
	Construct 0.7 miles of trail near the Dumbarton Bridge (2010).
	Create interpretive displays and build 2 bayside viewing platforms near pond habitat and historic salt marsh areas. (2009-10)
	Create an overlook in Menlo Park’s Bedwell Bayfront Park with views of the Ravenswood ponds. (2009)
Alviso Pond Complex	
	Connect 900 acres of ponds to the Bay, creating new marsh (Pond A6) and shallow water habitats (Pond A8) for pelicans, cormorants and ducks (2009-10).
	Enhance 250 acres of shallow ponds with nesting islands for migrating shorebirds (2010-12).
	Open 2.5 miles of new Bay Trail between Mountain View and Sunnyvale, adjacent to Moffett Field.
Eden Landing Pond Complex	
	Restore 630 acres of tidal habitat for endangered species (2010-11).
	Create 230 acres of pond habitat for a variety of species including ducks and snowy plovers (2011).
	Build 3.8 miles of new trail including a seasonally restricted loop trail (2011).
	Build an interpretive site with raised walkways and viewing platforms overlooking the remnants of the historic salt works (2011).
	Create a new kayak launch on Mt. Eden Creek (2011).

3. Science Update: New Lead Scientist on Board & a New Round of Research Underway

The Salt Pond Project welcomes Laura Valoppi as its new Lead Scientist. Laura comes to us from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, where she served most recently as chief of the Pacific Southwest Region Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program. She replaces Lynne A. Trulio,

an Environmental Studies professor at San Jose State University, who led the Salt Ponds science program from 2003 to 2007.



As Salt Ponds Lead Scientist, Laura is working for the U.S. Geological Survey within its Western Ecological Research Center. Her position, which she began in May, is funded jointly by the USGS, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Coastal Conservancy. Laura, seen here holding a Forster's tern chick, holds a Masters degree in water science from the University of California at Davis, and her diverse background includes work in environmental contamination biology, endangered species conservation, ecological risk assessment, habitat conservation planning and grants management.

As Lead Scientist, Laura's primary focus will be implementing Project's Adaptive Management Plan to ensure that the best and most relevant science is developed and presented to decision-makers and the public in order to assess Project success and guide future management decisions.

While Phase 1 construction moves soil and alters water flows, the Project's contract scientists are hard at work gathering data and performing analyses to help resolve scientific uncertainties and monitor the effects of management changes. Laura will oversee this work, including scientists involved in the 12 studies approved for funding earlier this year by the Project Management Team. Other studies are still under consideration, or would receive Project endorsement if funding is available from other sources. For more detailed information, please visit the [Science Page](#) of the project web site. Among the funded research:



Satellite Imagery Monitoring and Mapping – To track the effectiveness of restoration work, scientists will use satellite imaging and mapping to monitor changes at the broad landscape level of the South Bay, to observe the growth of salt marshes and changes in mudflat formations. Scientists will then verify the changes in the field. Project managers see this approach is the simplest and most cost-effective way to observe broad, long-term change across the entire Project area.

Fish Studies – Scientists will evaluate the benefits of restoration on the health of fish populations. They will do so by examining at the Alviso pond complex the distribution, abundance and health of a key pond- and marsh-dwelling fish, a type of goby known as the longjaw mudsucker, and looking at its health at ponds in different stages of restoration. Scientists will also look at concentrations of mercury in the fish.



4. Changing Face of Funding: State Fiscal Woes & Stimulus Monies



It has been a turbulent year on the Salt Ponds financial front, after California finance officials in December 2008 blocked the release of voter-approved bond funds in the face of dwindling state finances. The freeze forced the Project to halt construction and design work, as state bond funds were originally the major funding source for Phase 1 construction projects. In addition, some research, a Shoreline Study geotechnical study to assess levees, and the Project's entire public outreach component,

including meetings and website updates, were halted until the state released bond funds in July, 2009. In total, \$12 million of expected funds for Phase 1 construction were frozen.

Still, the overall financial impact to the Project, by mid-2009, has been largely muted, thanks to an infusion of federal dollars. Congress appropriated \$8 million in monies for fiscal years 2008 and 2009, and NOAA awarded \$7.5 million in economic stimulus funds to "shovel-ready" invasive *Spartina* control and restoration work at Eden Landing and Alviso ponds.

Project managers and funders were also able to juggle dollars to contribute federal, local government or private foundation money to protect time-sensitive efforts. And the frozen work did not result in any delays to the Project schedule.

It is in situations such as this that the multi-partner management and funding effort behind the Salt Pond Project shows its strengths. The state to date has provided the largest proportion of funds for the Salt Ponds, but the federal government, private foundations and local governments have also contributed substantial amounts of money, time and effort. This network of support has helped the Project weather difficult times.

Confirmed Phase 1 Construction Funding	
Funding Source	Amount in millions
Federal	
US Fish and Wildlife Service	\$8.8
NOAA	\$5.8
National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Program	\$1.0
North American Wetlands Conservation Act	\$0.1
State	
Coastal Conservancy (bonds)	\$2.72
Local	
Santa Clara Valley Water District	\$1.6
Alameda County Flood Control District	\$0.8
Foundation	
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation	\$0.6
Mitigation Funds	
Caltrans	\$1.1
Menlo Park	\$0.5
Total	\$23.02



Eden Landing historic saltworks.

5. Faces of the Restoration: Salt Ponds Interpretive Ranger Jennifer Heroux

She's led tours at Denali, shared the wonders of Yellowstone, and interpreted the subtropical depths of the Everglades. Now we have Jennifer Heroux here with us at the South Bay Salt Ponds, the Project's first interpretive ranger. Jennifer, who has been at work for about a year, is responsible for developing and implementing the Salt Ponds interpretive program in her ranger position at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge. That responsibility includes creating the themes and content of interpretive signs, designing and offering public tours, developing brochures and spreading the word about the Salt Ponds to the Bay Area's many diverse communities.

We caught up with Jennifer as she was preparing to lead the next day's early-morning-hours photography tour of the

1. How did you end up here at the Salt Ponds after seven years of moving from park to park for the National Park Service?

This position is actually very unusual in my field of work. It's both an amazing growth opportunity, but also a chance for me to use the range of my talents. For instance, I was in publishing, and before I wasn't doing writing and graphics work. I'm doing a combination of things I love to do here, rather than doing one thing or another. I couldn't have designed a more perfect job for myself if I'd been given a blank page.

2. What are you taking into consideration as you create the Salt Ponds public outreach and education programs?

I've been casting a broad net to see what kind of programs the public is interested in. We have a lot of competition here in the Bay Area; people are inundated by all the different non-profits, the Sierra Club and the community classes. There are so many opportunities for people to get out and do things. I've experimented with different types of programs to see who is coming out and what the local communities are willing to do. The successes so far include going out to Oliver Salt Works [a historic salt-making site at Eden Landing] – there is a lot of interest in seeing that site. We also had a great response to a Cris Benton event, the aerial kite photographer. We are offering regularly van tours of the Refuge, to see how the restoration is getting put together. The idea behind the van tour is we are reaching a different group of people. A lot of people use the trails for exercise, but there are not a lot of people who will run or bike the nine miles out. The van tours help people get out to some of those other areas, to have the

same sense of being in the middle of that landscape. There is a strong response to that. They are excited to get out there. Those tours are usually full.

The other program I had a lot of fun with was offering a beginning bird clinic. Sometimes you have to get started a little further back to get people excited about the resources. I'm teaching them how to use binoculars, what a bird book is, and going out and looking at some of the species who use the landscapes we are trying to restore. Then, when we talk about restoring for clapper rails, or what a shorebird is, we start getting people who are interested in that, they've seen shorebirds, they are connecting to them, then they have something to draw from.

3. What types of audiences to you think about when you are designing tours and programs?

We have so many different types of folks out here – it's fairly infinite, the combinations we could try. This facility, the Alviso Environmental Education Center, sees a lot of non-English speaking families. But we are also in the middle of Silicon Valley and all the tech industries, so we have a lot of younger professionals who have moved here and don't know anything about the resources of the Bay. You run the gamut from people who grew up in the Bay Area, who are always going out hiking, going to Tahoe to go skiing, to people who can't go to Tahoe, they just want open space near their house, and they're going to come out and do a walk with their family on the Refuge. We have millions of people here and just about every interest group is represented.

You can find [more information](#) about Jennifer's tours and programs on the Don Edwards web site. All tours and presentations start at the [Refuge Environmental Education Center](#) in Alviso. Please call her at 408-262-5513 ext. 106 to reserve your spot on a tour.

4. What are your plans for reestablishing the Salt Ponds docent program, which revolved around community-led tours of the Ravenswood ponds during the Initial Stewardship Program?

The long-term hope for what I will be doing is reinvigorating the docent program, to continue getting outside community members involved in the Ponds. The original docent program was a set tour with specific goals. Because of what I am discovering about the audiences down here, I'd like to have a program that is not one program. The previous docent program was a great program. I would want to continue using some version of that standard tour. But I'd also like to branch out. I'd like the docents to represent the community, so if someone is an expert – for example, Wayne does plankton labs for kids and adults, and is truly passionate about it, everybody has a great time – they present on those topics. I want the programs to be as unique as the docents, to keep it fresh and always changing.

5. This year you have been working on developing our first interpretive signs, to help visitors learn about and connect with the Ponds. What themes will visitors encounter?

We're trying to balance at each site the needs of the audiences with stories and messages we want to tell. The idea is to pick the messages to provoke people to think about where they're at, and to think about the project. For me, I'm happy if people walk away, and they're still thinking about something, or, a week later, something comes up, and they know a piece of information, or they understand something just a little bit more. It's those types of successes that will start getting people connected and invested in the long-term in the Project.

One of the things that connects us to both the past and the future is that this landscape is always changing. That is one of the themes—how things have changed through time, whether it's the uses, or the geological changes, the seasonal changes, the changes of the tides. The restoration project is helping the landscape change in a certain direction. When people were

converting the salt marches into salt ponds, they were changing the landscape in a way they thought was the best at that time. Now we'd like to change the land so it has different uses, as habitat, flood control.... We have different uses now, and we also have different values, so we are reshaping it once more.

6. Update: Shoreline Study

The South San Francisco Bay Shoreline Study, an inter-agency effort to develop a flood risk management and ecosystem restoration project in the South Bay suitable for Congressional authorization and funding, continues to move forward. The study, being pursued in tandem with the Salt Pond Project, could result in funding for construction of South Bay levees and restoration, if it receives all the necessary federal government approvals.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is continuing to research and model the potential for tidal flooding in the South Bay. Because of the state bond freeze, geotechnical studies were delayed for about six months, but that work has ramped up again. The Shoreline Study process receives 50% of its funding from the Corps and, for the initial work in the Alviso Ponds and Santa Clara County Area, 50% from local sources, the State Coastal Conservancy and the Santa Clara Valley Water District.

The Corps plans to complete floodplain maps by early 2010. These flood maps will show the existing and future flood conditions faced by communities in the South Bay if the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project were halted after Phase 1 and nothing else was done. The maps are designed to illustrate what would happen if neither flood protection nor habitat restoration measures beyond Phase 1 of the project were implemented. Any proposed project that results from the Shoreline Study will be weighed against these baseline conditions to determine the level of federal government investment through the Corps in the solution. For more information please visit the [South Bay Shoreline Study](#) web site.

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