



# South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project

*Restoring the Wild Heart of the South Bay*

**September 2010**

Welcome to the 23rd 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](http://www.southbayrestoration.org).

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**1. On the Ground:**

After years of planning and site preparation this Fall marks the launch and the completion of several habitat, recreation and flood control projects for the Project. Below is a brief summary. For an overview of our progress to date, please visit the [Track Our Progress](#) page of the project web site.



### **Eden Landing Complex: Work Begins! In**

August, the Project broke ground on the first phase of restoration at the Eden Landing ponds in the East Bay along the Hayward shoreline. This first phase includes 630-acre area of former salt ponds now managed by the California Department of Fish and Game, all of which will be restored to a thriving tidal marsh.

The historic systems of sinuous branching channels are expected to provide quality habitat for fish and wildlife, including the endangered California clapper rail. Lowering of the outboard levee will create marsh habitat around the perimeter of the restoration site, which is expected to provide escape cover for the endangered salt marsh harvest mouse. The restoration at Eden Landing is also designed to create small ponds called pannes, which are typical, but not ubiquitous, features of historic and mature salt marshes that provide important habitat for birds.

One of the ponds has a hard gypsum layer from historic salt making, which could slow the process of marsh restoration. Some of the gypsum will be treated by breaking it up to compare marsh development with and without treatment.

The work, which will include lowering and breaching levees, is partly funded by a federal stimulus grant from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The project is expected to be completed in the fall of 2011.

### **Ravenswood Complex: SF-2 Construction Completed Ahead of Schedule, Trail to Open September 7th**

One of the project's most visible ponds, known as SF-2 in the Ravenswood pond complex, has undergone a dramatic transformation this summer. What was once a salt-encrusted moonscape has now been developed into watery welcome mat migrating shorebirds. The 240-acre site near the west end of the Dumbarton bridge has been transformed into network of islands and waterways with a large section of dry land habitat for endangered snowy plovers.

Although commuters across the bridge will be able to grab quick glances from their cars, we encourage you to take time to walk the short trail (less than a mile) to one of two new viewing platforms at the site.

The trail will open officially during a ribbon cutting with Senator Dianne Feinstein on the morning of September 7<sup>th</sup>. For more information about that event please [visit the project web site for details.](#)





### **Alviso Complex: Pond A8 Construction Nearing Completion; Pond A6 to Be Breached in October**

Plenty of activity is underway at the Alviso Ponds this summer as well. Workers are expected to complete a notch in one of the levees by September that will connect 1,400 acres of ponds to the Bay in what is known as a muted tidal system. Water will probably be introduced in the spring, although managers are looking into the possibility of allowing controlled tidal action to enter the pond this fall. A critical part of the restoration work at Pond A8 involves monitoring for mercury. As part of the restoration project's ongoing Adaptive Management Plan, the notch is designed so that the ponds can be separated again from the Bay, should mercury become a problem. Construction was managed by the Santa Clara Valley Water District, which helped to fund the project, along with state funding and some federal stimulus money from NOAA.

Further afield, at Pond A6 in Alviso, which is quite far from the South Bay shoreline, project managers are preparing to begin construction on a project that will connect an additional 330 of former industrial salt ponds to the Bay. The gulls have finished nesting at the site and work will commence with the goal of restoring the pond to tidal marsh and tidal channel habitat.



### **Alviso Complex: 2.2 Miles of Bay Trail to Open September 20th**

After a long delay due to issues with the land transfer, a new 2.2 mile trail connecting the Shoreline at Mountain and the City of Sunnyvale is slated to open on Tuesday, September 20<sup>th</sup>. Congresswoman Anna Eshoo as well as agency representatives and member of the Bay Trail will be on hand to celebrate the event. [For details please visit the project web site.](#)



## 2. Forum and Working Group Meetings Scheduled for this Fall

Your input on the development of the restoration project is very important to us. If you would like to learn more about the project or learn the latest about our ongoing science program, please consider attending one of our regular public meetings. The Stakeholder Forum, which has been meeting continuously since the project started in 2003, will hold its annual meeting on October 28th. The Forum meeting is a good place to learn more about the project overall and to interact with members of the Forum who represent a wide array of public interests from local community and conservation organizations, to elected officials, business leaders and recreation advocates. In addition to the Forum meetings, we will also convene geographic-based Working Group meetings for each of the three pond complexes that make up the restoration project. The Alviso Working Group will meet for an update on the restoration activities in the Alviso area on September 23<sup>rd</sup>. Details for both these meetings are listed below. For detailed agendas and directions please visit the [Events and Meetings](#) section of the project web site.

What	When	Where
<b>Alviso Working Group Meeting</b>	Thursday September 23, 2011 1 pm to 4 pm	Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant 700 Los Esteros Road, San Jose
<b>Stakeholder Forum Meeting</b>	Thursday October 28, 2011 1 pm to 4 pm	Near the Ravenswood Pond Complex- check the web site for details.

## 3. Other Public Outreach Updates



### **Become a Friend of the Salt Ponds on Facebook**

Want to receive regular updates, interesting trivia and the latest pictures and videos about the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration? Join us on [Facebook](#). Click here to see our page and to join as a friend of the project.

### **New Regional Electronic Newsletters**

This summer, the Project introduced a new electronic newsletter for the Alviso area. Similar newsletters will be produced in the coming year for Eden Landing and Ravenswood Pond Complexes. The plan is to produce an electronic newsletter for each of the three regions once a year, as well as the quarterly project-wide electronic newsletter. Click here to read the [Alviso Update](#), which was emailed to members of the Alviso Working Group in July.

### **Phase 2 Planning Begins**

The Project Management Team has launched an internal planning process to consider possible restoration and public access options for Phase 2, which would begin construction in 2012 or later. After developing a list of possible and feasible projects, the plan for Phase 2 will be shared with Project partners and the public to gather input and ideas.



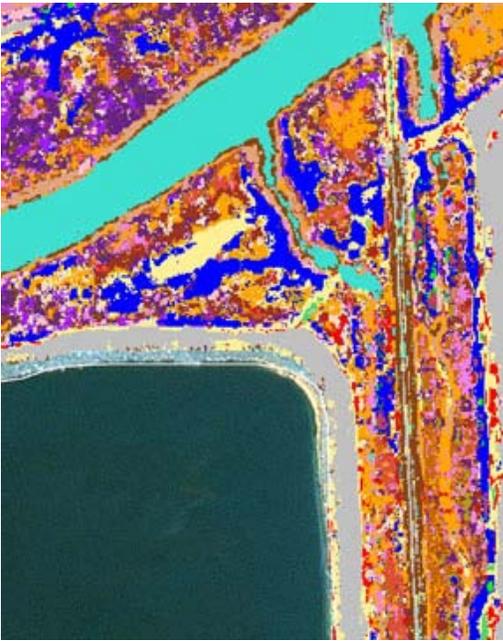
### **4. New Crew of Volunteer Docents Expands Tours of the Project Area**

This spring the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project officially restarted its volunteer docent program. Thirteen people, a mix of returning docents, current Refuge interns and volunteers and new recruits, completed a June training program. They are now working to create their own programs, which will be offered to the public this Fall.

During the training, which took place over the course of two Thursday nights and a beautiful Saturday, docents were introduced to a range of topics from birds and habitats to restoration actions and Refuge history. The pace was fast and intense, but everyone was up for the challenge!

The ultimate goal of the Docent program is to get community members developing and presenting their own programs to the public. About half of the training covered the basic skills needed to give presentations. The docent team is already well on their way to developing their own programs. This fall the Refuge will offer an exciting lineup of new ways to explore the restoration project. Steve Dill will be offering extended bike rides through the Alviso ponds. Laurel Stell is delving into tides and their importance to South Bay ecosystems through a short talk and walk. Jane Moss will walk the public through the restoration changes at Pond SF2. Alex Baranda is hosting a series of bird photography programs at different restoration sites. Please check the [Events and Meetings](#) page of the project web site for details on these and other public outings at the restoration project.

While it's too late to join the 2010 team, please contact Jennifer Heroux at (408) 262-5513 x106 or [Jennifer\\_heroux@fws.gov](mailto:Jennifer_heroux@fws.gov) to learn about other ways to get involved or to sign up for 2011!



## 5. Science Update: Salt Ponds Satellite Images Show Trends in Mud & Invasive Vegetation

They look like brightly colored abstract paintings. But they're not. These close-ups from the first year of South Bay satellite imagery-based vegetation and sediment maps, rather than aiming to please the eye, provide densely packed information about the distribution of mudflats, native salt marsh vegetation and invasive exotic species.

The Project contracted with researchers to develop the maps using satellite imagery as a cost-effective way to track long-term habitat changes across the entire project area. Using annual satellite imagery, researchers have built a vegetation model for the region and then gone into the field at various locations to “ground -truth” what they have interpreted from the model. Each year's map will show changes in vegetation, mudflat development and channel formation.

Brian Fulfroost of Design, Community & Environment is heading the research effort and has just completed the first year of verified and validated maps. He has also taken a look at data from Year 2 and reports that the imagery shows an increase in the growth of pepperweed, an invasive exotic that often crowds out native marsh species.

As this is the first year of the project, the team has focused on testing how well their model is able to translate the satellite imagery into maps of what is actually growing on the ground and making adjustments to improve accuracy. One challenge they have had to overcome is the fact that the satellite is timed to take pictures of the South Bay around noon, when shadows are limited and the likelihood of obtaining a high quality image is highest. However, this timing runs counter to a second goal which is to obtain pictures of mudflats. Because mudflats emerge at low tide, and low tides rarely occur at noon, project managers are doing their best to select imagery with the greatest amount of information. A report summarizing the team’s first year data will be available on [the Science page](#) of the project web site next month.



## ***Mark Your Calendar for the Science Symposium!***

The South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Science Team, headed by lead scientists Laura Valoppi, is planning the next Science Symposium for 2011. This event will be the third of its kind for the restoration project and will include a day of presentations,

poster sessions and discussion about the latest science news related to restoration in the South Bay. The event will take place at the USGS Menlo Park Facility on Thursday, February 3, 2011. We will provide more details as they become available.



## 6. A Note from Congressman Mike Honda

At the southern end of the San Francisco Bay, we are undertaking the largest tidal restoration on the west coast, known as the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration project, which will restore and enhance 15,000 acres of wetland habitat. As a Member of the House Appropriations Committee and proud supporter of this project, I have worked tirelessly with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, my Bay Area Colleagues in the House, and our California Senators to secure the millions of federal dollars, complementing the private donations, needed for this critical project.

Converting 15,000 acres of commercial salt ponds into a mix of tidal marsh, mudflat and other wetland habitats will not be easy, but it is essential we do so, for three reasons – our people, our planet and our pocketbook.

For our people, the newly restored wetlands will offer a critical buffer against the effects of global climate change, already witnessed in melting glaciers and rising sea levels, displacement of wildlife, and increasingly volatile weather patterns. South Bay communities are not invulnerable to these impacts and the threat of rising sea levels, erosion, and flooding must be taken seriously. Healthy coastal and marine ecosystems offer substantially better protection of onshore communities, something that has been proven in Southeast Asia during the Tsunami and even the Gulf Coast during Hurricane Katrina. By restoring the South Bay, we put in place a natural barrier useful in protecting local residents from future climate-related impacts.

For our planet, the restoration project immediately addresses the loss of 85 percent of the natural marsh lands originally lost to commercial salt production, agriculture and development along the Bay's edge. Additionally, remaining native animal and plant species have been further threatened by increased development over recent years and I believe it is our responsibility to reverse this trend. In restoring the wetlands, we hope to not only see endangered native species return to the South Bay, but to return their numbers to a less vulnerable status. Furthermore, the return of natural beauty to the Salt Ponds will provide the Bay Area with a beautiful place for recreation and exploration.

For our pocketbook, this project is an investment in our regional economy. The restoration of these wetlands will also provide a natural buffer against flooding by absorbing and slowing floodwaters. Currently, the Silicon Valley is vulnerable to flooding, a reality that, in a worst-case scenario, would have a catastrophic impact on our region. Silicon Valley is arguably one of the most valuable business regions in California and is the center of America's technology innovation. The U.S. Army Corps, the Santa Clara Valley Water District and other agencies estimate this restoration project will protect more than 10,000 lives and \$5 billion dollars in property.

Lastly, the educational opportunities on this project are perhaps of most interest to me as a former educator. The wetlands will provide students the opportunity to learn about the effects of global warming. The more educated we become about this project, and about climate change,

the greater the impact we can make on local, regional and national efforts to reduce global warming. With the rising emphasis placed on green jobs and environmental awareness, our students will become better educated about our native climate, wildlife and plant life - and our lifestyles' impact on all of it. Our children will be able to grow up with an appreciation for nature, and they will be able to pass on their appreciation and knowledge to future generations.

This 50-year restoration project is an investment with profound implications for our future. I hope that you all will join me in supporting this project as we restore and protect one of the few remaining natural treasures in the Bay Area.

*-Rep Michael Honda, who represents CA-15<sup>th</sup> district, serves on the House Appropriations Committee and is a member of the House Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition.*

***Photo Credits: Alex Baranda, Cris Benton Brian Fulfroast and Judy Irving***