



# South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project



## September 2006

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

### In this issue:

- [1. Stakeholder Forum Reviews Design for Public Access Features](#)
- [2. Putting It All Together—How Will We Fund the Restoration?](#)
- [3. Faces of the Restoration: Roy Peek and Family Tour the Salt Ponds](#)
- [4. Busy Year for Science Team](#)
- [5. On the Ground: ISP Update on Birds, Biochemistry and an Off Road Vehicle Bust!](#)
- [6. A Green Light for Bair Island Restoration](#)
- [7. How to Learn More](#)
- [8. How to Get Involved](#)

## 1. Stakeholder Forum Reviews Design for Public Access Features-- Next Forum Meeting Scheduled for October 4, 2006

More than fifty people attended the Stakeholder Forum meeting in July at the Fremont Public Library. At the meeting, Stakeholder Forum members and others received updates about the status of the restoration planning process and the habitat restoration, flood protection and recreation features that will be included in



Phase One. They were also briefed on potential designs for public access amenities including trails, viewing platforms and signage. Pictured here are two concept designs presented to the Forum. The first is for a proposed kayak and boat launch site, the second is for the proposed Salt Works Trail. A summary of minutes of [this](#) and [other](#) Stakeholder Forum meetings is available on the project web site.

The next Forum meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, October 4<sup>th</sup> from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. at a location to be announced. The Forum will be reviewing a revised proposal for public participation during the implementation phase of the project and will hear more details about the Adaptive



Management Plan. The public is welcome and encouraged to attend these meetings. For more information about the agenda as well as the Stakeholder Forum meeting location and directions please visit [Events and Meetings](#) on the web site.

## **2. Putting It All Together—How Will We Fund the Restoration?**

When the South Bay Salt Ponds were purchased in 2003, it was clear that money would be needed not only for the acquisition, but also for the planning and implementation of a final restoration plan. The State Dept of Fish and Game and the US Fish and Wildlife Service were able to purchase 16,500 acres of salt ponds in the South Bay and along the Napa River using a unique combination of state, federal and private foundation funding. Additional funding from these sources has enabled project managers and the public to engage in a comprehensive planning process over the past three years. As we look forward to the first phase of restoration commencing in 2008, project managers are considering a variety of different funding sources. We will discuss each of these sources in more detail in subsequent issues of the newsletter. The funding mix could include the following:

- ✓ Federal budget allocations
- ✓ State bond measures and budget allocations
- ✓ Local funding measures and assessments
- ✓ Mitigation funds
- ✓ Environmental fines
- ✓ Private contributions from businesses, foundations and individuals

## **3. Faces of the Restoration: Roy Peek and His Family**

*Amy Hutzel from the State Coastal Conservancy recently toured the Eden Landing section of the project with Roy Peek whose family has been associated with the salt ponds for five generations. She provides this personal account of their trip.*



On a beautiful Thursday afternoon in mid-August, John Krause from the California Department of Fish and Game and I toured Eden Landing with a family who has personal ties to the salt ponds. Roy and his family are pictured here with Roy standing on the left. Roy Peek had contacted me several months beforehand because his great-great grandfather, Peter Michelsen, had played a role in the construction of the Eden Landing pond complex. The Michelsen ponds were built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century in the northwest corner of what is now the Eden Landing Ecological Reserve. Roy's Wife, Gayla, his mother and father Barbara and Tom, brother Ken, and a couple friends joined us on the adventure.

We started the afternoon looking at some beautiful black and white prints made from glass slides that have been passed down in Roy's family. Niels Neilsen, Roy's great grandfather and Peter Michelsen's son-in-law, took the photos, mostly dating from near 1900. One of those prints is pictured here. After reviewing a map of the area that showed where the Michelsen Ponds were, we drove out on the levees to the general area, taking detours around large construction vehicles



being used to build a new levee and driving through truck-high stands of mustard growing on another levee. We walked around the old Archimedes Screws that can be seen from Highway 92. Barbara said that her mother would always point the windmills out to her as they drove over the San Mateo Bridge, saying "that's where we used to picnic." We also discovered an old house site at the edge of one of the salt ponds. The salt pond was dry, so it was relatively easy to explore, although one of us did end up knee deep in black, smelly salt pond mud.

Ironically, Roy now works within a stone's throw of the salt ponds, at Novo Nordisk, a pharmaceutical company in an office building on Eden Landing Road. He has taken his old photos into work to let the company know that they weren't the first Danish entrepreneurs in the area! Following the tour Roy said, "After seeing the former family land only from a distance for so many years it was great to have a chance to actually walk where the earlier generations had been."

If you are interested in learning more about the cultural history of the ponds, take a look at the [Cultural Resources Report](#) on the project web site.

#### **4. Busy Year for the Science Team**

This year has been extremely productive for the Project's science program. Under the direction of Lead Scientist Dr. Lynne Trulio, the Science Team has been working with project consultants to help prepare the environmental documents that will be released at the beginning of 2007. Specifically, the Science Team has been developing a series of Applied Studies that will be conducted during the implementation phase of the restoration. The studies will help to answer critical questions about mercury uptake at certain ponds, factors affecting marsh evolution and other physical, biological and social questions related to the restoration. The Science Team has also been working hard on a master document that coordinates the project's restoration goals with a schedule of monitoring and applied studies. The document, which is included in the Adaptive Management Plan for the project, will be released as part of the Draft EIR/EIS in 2007.

Another focus of the 2006 Science Program has been to highlight the breadth and depth of current research directly relevant to the restoration project. To that end, the Science Team hosted a one-day Science Symposium this summer at the San Jose State University campus. Eighteen scientists presented talks on their research and almost 30 others presented posters on topics from sediment dynamics to recreation and wildlife interactions. The Symposium highlighted the need for research on a number of topics, especially Bay-pond interactions and mercury effects. Over 150 people attended the Symposium and the wine-and-cheese reception that followed. The event helped to spotlight the wide array of high-quality research being generated by the project and the need for future symposia about South Bay restoration science.

#### **5. On the Ground: ISP Update on Birds, Biochemistry, and an Off-Road Vehicle Bust!**



In the last issue, of the newsletter we mentioned that Snowy Plovers were nesting at the project site. The Snowy Plover is currently threatened with extinction and 47 breeding pairs were spotted within the project area this spring. The Plover chicks have since hatched and made their way to the water. Now phalaropes, stilts, avocets, sandpipers, herons, egrets, cormorants and least terns are taking advantage of the ponds. We expect ducks and geese to

start appearing this fall and to stay through the winter until it is time for them to return north for breeding in the spring. Of particular interest is the increase in number and diversity of birds using the Island Ponds (Ponds A19, 20 & 21), which were restored to tidal action this spring. Shorebirds and fish-eating birds are now flocking to these ponds which, prior to restoration, were devoid of fish and only used by gulls.

Under the guidance of the Initial Stewardship Plan (ISP), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Service and the CA Department of Fish and Game have been working to manage the ponds for water birds and to prevent unwanted salinity increases while preparing the 15,100 acre site for long-term restoration, which begins in 2008. Over the past few years, managers have been using a series of carefully orchestrated levee breaches to reduce the salinity of the ponds. One such breach is scheduled for early October, when managers at Eden Landing will break through a levee along the side of North Creek.

This summer, as in previous summers, there has been a temporary, but persistent drop in dissolved oxygen levels in the ponds during the warm months of June, July and August. The problem was exacerbated this year by July's record setting heat wave. However, after the heat wave subsided, most of the ponds' dissolved oxygen levels returned to healthy levels. If left unchecked, low dissolved oxygen levels can be harmful to fish and other aquatic species. Project managers continue to work closely with the Regional Water Quality Control Board to monitor and minimize the threat posed by this problem.

Although one of the three goals of the restoration project is to provide wildlife oriented public access and recreation, off-road vehicles do not fall into that category-- nor does public trespassing. That was made clear last month when several individuals were arrested on the Eden Landing portion of the site for riding off-road vehicles through fragile habitat areas. Working with East Bay Regional Park District Staff and a patrol helicopter, Department of Fish and Game officials were able to apprehend the trespassers to prevent further damage to the area. The incident points to one of the many challenges facing this large urban wetland restoration project which lies at the heart of the Bay Area and its 7 million residents.

## **6. A Green Light for Bair Island**

The South Bay Salt Pond Restoration is the largest in a series of restoration puzzle pieces designed to bring back tidal habitats around the Bay. Over the next decade each of these pieces will help to bring back the Bay's missing tidal habitats—partially restoring the rich mosaic of sloughs, mudflats, and tidal marsh that once ringed the Bay. One such project, which fits snugly along the northwest corner of the South Bay Salt Pond project, is Bair Island.

This summer the \$10 million Bair Island restoration project received a green light to convert 1400 acres of brown, diked former marshland to a thriving tidal marsh. The project, which came in at less than half the of the original price estimate, will benefit from an economic shift in the way dredge materials are handled in the Bay. The previous



restoration plan assumed the Refuge would pay for one million cubic yards of fill material each summer to help build up the project site which has subsided 2.5 feet since the 1940s. But construction companies are now poised to pay the Refuge for the privilege of dumping their dredge on Bair Island. The Port of Redwood City is eager to channel its dredged silt across Redwood Creek to Bair instead of shipping it to a deep hole near Alcatraz.

The project will also benefit from plenty of volunteer support. Under the guidance of Save the Bay, volunteers have already removed 20,000 pounds of invasive ice plant and experimented with planting several native species on the restoration site. The project will not only benefit endangered species like the California clapper rail and the salt marsh harvest mouse, it will also provide important habitat for steelhead and salmon. For more information about volunteering at Bair Island contact [Save the Bay](#). To view the Bair Island Restoration [Report](#) or to read [recent news articles](#) on the Bair Island project visit the project web site.

## 7. How to learn more

### 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 [Events and Meetings](#) on the project web site.



**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.

**c. Listen to the podcast:** The project has produced [two short podcasts](#) about the project that include interviews with Executive Project Director Steve Ritchie. For additional podcasts about Bay restoration, visit [www.yourwetlands.org](http://www.yourwetlands.org).

**d. 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.

## **8. How to get involved**

**a. Participate in a Volunteer Work Day** Join Save The Bay and the CA Department of Fish and Game, and help clean up debris and remove non-native plants in preparation for a levee breach this Fall. Learn about plans for the larger breach project and how it's connected to the South Bay Salt Ponds Restoration Project. School groups, corporate groups, and individual volunteers are all welcome. For a complete list of Saturday volunteer days, please visit [Event and Meetings](#) on the project web site.

**b. 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 [Event and Meetings](#) on the project web site.

**Photo Credits:** (Thank you to Amy Hutzler, Roy Peek, Rob Holt, Donna Plunkett from EDAW, and The Point Reyes Bird Observatory for contributing photos to this issue of the newsletter)