



CITIZENS COMMITTEE TO COMPLETE THE REFUGE

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Attn: Caitlin Sweeney, Senior Planner

July 20, 2005

RE: Staff Report and Preliminary Recommendations for Proposed Bay Plan Amendment No. 3-04 Concerning the Update of the Bay Plan Salt Ponds and Other Managed Wetlands Finding and Policies, Salt Pond Plan Map Designations, and Plan Map Notes, Policies and Suggestions, dated June 3, 2005

Dear Mr. Travis, Commissioners, Alternatives and Staff,

The Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge has reviewed the documents referenced above and would like to thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. We commend your staff on the tremendous job they have done, the documents are comprehensive and synthesize much of the current scientific literature regarding the ecological importance and restoration of the salt ponds of San Francisco Bay. As you are aware, the Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge has worked long to acquire the salt ponds with the goal of eventually recapturing the lost diversity of habitats that once made up the bay ecosystem. We respectfully submit the following comments:

Salt Ponds and Other Managed Wetlands:

- Page 5, Findings g: The value of salt ponds for the federally listed California least tern has not been mentioned. California least terns utilize ponds capable of supporting fish for foraging and as training areas for juveniles. Isolated levees, islands and abandoned structures within these ponds are used as roosting areas. Islands also have the potential to provide nesting habitat.

Crystallizers have value as breeding habitat for the western snowy plover. In addition, crystallizers may provide foraging habitat for shorebirds during the rainy season.

- Page 7, Policies 2: Suggested wording – This type of purchase should have a high priority for any public funds available, because opening ponds to the Bay represents a substantial opportunity to *recover tidal marsh habitat (and its associated suite of sloughs, pannes, etc.) and lost or rare Bay habitats*. Restoring *tidal marsh and rare habitats* or managing ponds can benefit fish, other aquatic

organisms and wildlife. *In addition, restoring tidal marsh or managing ponds provide numerous benefits to the residents of the Bay Area.*

We suggest this section should make mention of the importance of restoring a diversity of former bay habitats including, but not limited to, seasonal wetlands, fresh water marshes, pannes, salinas, and gradual transitions to upland habitat.

- Page 7, Policies g/Page 8, Policies b: We have concerns with word choices that may prove too objective. For example, “*maximize public access*” and “*avoiding significant adverse effects on wildlife*” places emphasis on providing public access and may set the threshold for adverse impacts to wildlife too low, particularly for federally listed species or species of special concern. What would be considered a “*significant adverse effect*”, and how would this be determined? If the word “*significant*” is to remain, then it must be made clear that “*significant adverse effects*” will have very different meanings for different species, for example, just causing a listed species to alter its behavior (e.g. temporarily moving away from a location) could be considered a “take” under endangered species regulations and must therefore be considered a “significant adverse effect.”
- Page 7, Policies h: When you refer to “highly saline discharges into the Bay” does this include bittern? We are assuming it does, but would appreciate clarification.
- Page 8, Policies a: Seasonal wetlands, fresh water marshes, sandy beaches, pans, etc. and adjacent uplands should be added to the list of types of habitats that might be restored – or it might be possible to change the wording from “tidal marsh” to “tidal marsh and the associated suite of habitats that were once found along the edges of the Bay.”

Staff Report, Salt Ponds, dated June 3, 2005:

- Page 3, Values of Salt Ponds: Crystallizers are utilized for nesting by the federally listed western snowy plover. Additionally, feeding shorebirds have been observed after the salt is harvested and the crystallizers collect water from winter rainfall events.
- Page 3, Restoration Potential of Salt Ponds: As stated above, in addition to the habitats mentioned: subtidal, tidal flats, tidal marsh, or managed salt ponds, habitats such as seasonal wetlands, pans, fresh water marshes, and gradual transitions to uplands (this list is not complete) were once important components of the bay ecosystem and should be mentioned.
- Page 14, Salt Refinement and Salt Markets: We do not believe it is appropriate to include the “appraised value” of the recently acquired salt ponds. We have concerns regarding the appraised value of the property and its adverse effect on the public’s ability to acquire other wetlands in the future. It is our understanding

the California Office of Real Estate Appraisals continues to investigate these transactions, therefore we respectfully request you remove this section of the discussion.

- Page 71, Local Government Land Use Designations: Redwood City Plant Site. It is noteworthy in the discussion of zoning for the Redwood City bayfront, the voting public has indicated a desire to restrict development along the edges of the Bay. In recent years, in general elections, the people have repeatedly voted down developments on former wetlands within the city. Last year Measure Q resoundingly rejected the Bayshore Development.
- General comments: Levees, islands, and abandoned structures (piles, etc.) provide roosting and nesting habitat for a variety of birds, including the federally listed western snowy plover and California least tern.

The federally listed salt marsh harvest mouse is another species that must be considered in the discussion of Habitat Composition Tradeoffs (page 39).

- The Redwood City Plant and the Newark Plant (crystallizers, pickle and bittern ponds) were identified by Congress in the 1990, “Land Protection Plan, Potential Additions to San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge.”

These lands were added to the land protection plan because they provide the opportunity for the preservation and enhancement of highly significant wildlife habitat for the protection of migratory waterfowl and other wildlife, including species known to be threatened with extinction.

These lands also provide an opportunity for wildlife oriented recreation and nature study within the open space so preserved.

- We fully support the staff findings regarding Recreation Boating (page 58).

Once again we would like to commend BCDC staff on the effort that went into creating these documents. We thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

Sincerely,

Florence M. LaRiviere
Chairperson