



CITIZENS COMMITTEE TO COMPLETE THE REFUGE

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Remembering the Honorable Don Edwards January 6, 1915 - October 2, 2015

I think it was one morning in the late 1960's that I read a small notice in the Mercury News inviting anyone worried at the great rate the bay's marshes were being destroyed, to come to an office in San Jose the following day.

That was my first meeting with Art Ogilvie, a Santa Clara County planner who had the show-stopping idea that we could have a national wildlife refuge here, to save our remaining wetlands!

We went to every conceivable public meeting, showing pictures of our remarkable wildlife, and decrying the rapid destruction of most of the lands along the shoreline.

Then we arrived at the crucial moment—we had to have a member of congress to carry our bill to establish what proved to be a landmark, the first urban wildlife refuge in the nation.

As I remember, Art Ogilvie and Tom Harvey, biology professor at San Jose State, made the fateful visit to Congressman Don Edwards. They went, aware of his civil rights and peace activism, but knowing nothing about his environmental concerns. First, he took that most important beginning step—he listened to them. He recognized saving these lands was the right thing to do, and he had the vision and the political skill to bring along the entire bay area congressional delegation, with no regard to political party. Still, four years passed before his bill was enacted, and President Nixon signed it into law.

That was 1972-- we dusted off our hands, and had a party with Mr. Edwards to celebrate.

We felt pretty smug, in fact, it took us until 1986 to take another look and realize we were sadly lacking in a variety of habitat types. The only solution was to return to our congressman. And we did. His response was an immediate yes! This time, with the wonderful San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge already established, and soon to be named in his honor, the public responded with enthusiasm, and four hundred people came to Ohlone College to support Mr. Edwards at a public meeting on the issue. For once the opposition was wonderfully outnumbered by a large, enthusiastic and vocal group. This time, his bill was enacted the first year he proposed it, another red letter day—in October, 1988!

Mr. Edwards' living legacy is the marshes of San Francisco Bay, the wildlife that inhabits them, clean air and water and places of serenity for the human population.

His was a life well-lived.

Florence LaRiviere