



SAVE WETLANDS

Newsletter of the Citizens Committee To Complete The Refuge

Newsletter Issue 39

Fall 2009

An Incomplete Picture

Do you have a favorite image of San Francisco Bay? One of ours is the view from the Janice Delfino Memorial Bench on top of the hill at the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Headquarters. It's a breath-taking picture of the bay and its varied habitats, and we are reminded if not for the establishment of the Refuge thirty-five years ago, the landscape could have been strikingly different. Instead of sweeping vistas of San Francisco Bay and lands that support iconic species like the salt marsh harvest mouse, California clapper rail, multitudes of shorebirds and waterfowl, etc. we could be looking out onto a sea of condos.



Photo by Carin High

This scene like the vision of completing the Refuge is not secure. In the late 1980's Don Edwards was successful in securing congressional approval to expand the boundaries of the Refuge by another 20,000 acres. Undeveloped lands around the edges of the bay were continuing to be consumed by development at an alarming rate. It had become apparent that many of these lands contained types of habitat that had not been included within the original boundaries of the Refuge and were crucial to include and protect if we were to maintain the biodiversity of the bay.

We have been fortunate to have acquired many of those lands in the past two decades, but elements key to restoring and maintaining the biodiversity of the bay ecosystem are still missing.

Transition zones from wetlands to uplands, uplands, and riparian habitats are extremely rare. Tragically, some of the tracts of land where these habitats can best be recovered are now under imminent threat of development and could be lost to the bay ecosystem forever. As added insult, these areas could also provide a crucial hedge against sea level rise providing areas where tidal marsh species could migrate upslope -- an attribute that is extremely difficult to replicate within the San Francisco Bay ecosystem.

Planning processes are underway for several important parcels of land that include: 1433 acres of crystallizers and ponds in Redwood City, 420 acres of uplands, seasonal wetlands, and willow grove habitat on Patterson Ranch in Fremont, and the seasonal wetlands, open water ponds, uplands, and salt marsh harvest mouse habitat of the former Whistling Wings and Pintail duck clubs in Newark.

The Final Environmental Assessment for Refuge expansion boundary, written in March 1990 concluded, "The protection of these natural areas is critical not only for wildlife, but to maintain the quality of life of all bay area inhabitants." Completion of the Refuge is essential to fulfilling the goals of enhancing, restoring, and preserving the biodiversity and health of our beloved bay.

Please join us in the battle to protect these lands.

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Photto by Kate High

Rose Foundation

We are deeply grateful for the generous grant we received this year from the Rose Foundation. This grant will provide us the tools, legal and scientific to help us achieve our long-range goal of protection, aquisition, and restoration of all remaining wetlands on San Francisco Bay. Our profound thanks to the Foundation for providing the research we could not have otherwise managed.

Citizens for Alameda’s Last Marshlands

Alameda National Wildlife Refuge – WHY?

In 1994 the USFWS requested a portion of the Alameda Naval Air Station property as an addition to the National Wildlife Refuge system. These lands are more valuable today than fifteen years ago.

Here are a few important reasons why:

1. The “refuge” hosts the largest and northernmost colony of endangered California least terns with between 350 and 400 breeding pairs. *In 2008 this colony produced the world’s highest number of fledglings.* The same may prove true for 2009.
2. The “refuge” island breakwater is a traditional destination for thousands of brown pelicans during summer and fall and the largest pelican roost in SF Bay. The breakwater is a haul-out for harbor seals and hosts nesting birds.
3. At least 24 species of birds breed on the “refuge” including great blue herons, horned larks, sparrows, finches, black oyster-catchers, raptors, shorebirds and more.

4. The “refuge” is the last and perfect place to allow inner-city families experience, understand, and claim ownership to nature in their own community. It could become a learning and research center. It would attract tourism and provide economic benefits.
5. No fewer than 168 species of birds have been seen since surveys began in April 2004. Winter flocks of killdeer number over a hundred. Amazing!
6. In addition to birds: mammals, reptiles, insects, and unique plants call this place home. And there are some people who call it home too.

We have been working for fifteen long years to protect this important resource area and to see this treasure added to national wildlife refuge system. Any other use of this site would put all these resources in jeopardy.

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Charleston Slough

The BCDC permit requires at least 50 acres of tidal marsh to be established in Charleston Slough. After many years of effort, the administration of the recovery of the inner Slough is now in the hands of John Marchant, who has held that position for the last 4 or 5 months. His background is in Parks and Rec. He in turn appears to be backed by Jack Smith for the technical aspects of the planned recovery.

While the final report on conditions in the slough is due now, the failure of significant vegetation to materialize has led longtime consultant hydrologist Bob Coats to recommend in a brief report that an additional gate between the inner and outer sloughs be

opened in time to catch the high tides of January and be left open for one additional year.

This procedure and studies during the extra year have been approved by BCDC. Copies of both the Coats report and the BCDC permit have been promised to the Committee.

John Marchant may be reached at (650) 903-6088.
Philip D. LaRiviere
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SaveWetlands In Mayhews

Area 4 in Newark, home to the former Whistling Wings and Pintail Duck Clubs, remains viewed by the City of Newark as a future housing site and golf course. Much of Area 4 is included within the expansion boundary of the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge for good reason. The wetlands and former duck clubs could be easily restored to habitat for endangered species and other wildlife. Located at the head of Mowry Slough, restoration of most of Area 4 is also considered by the Goals Project as a top priority.

Area 4 is a complex of wetlands and seasonal uplands with associated upland habitat. Its unique habitat variety is seldom seen in the Bay Area. This makes Area 4 a choice addition for the Fish and Wildlife Service. Harbor Seals haul out along



Fremont

What is it about places that capture our souls and hold them fast? The Coyote Hills area in Fremont is one such place. It is a place apart from all others in the bay area - in part because of the diversity of habitats and species found there; in part because of the respite it provides in a busy urban area. You can lose yourself amidst the wheeling of white pelicans in the sky, the stealthy slither of a gopher snake, the raucous quacking of ducks, the rustle of the wind through the cattails.

Patterson Ranch is part of this landscape and part of a larger goal biologists and environmentalists around the bay have held since 1980’s when the lands were congressionally approved for inclusion within the Refuge expansion boundary. That goal was, and is to protect the biodiversity of the bay. For the Coyote Hills/ Patterson Ranch area the recommendations are to restore, expand and preserve grasslands, seasonal wetlands, and rare willow grove habitat. Such actions would benefit not only wildlife but

future generations of bay area residents.

Now after several failed attempts, plans for a massive development have resurfaced and an EIR has been circulated. 878 housing units and commercial space are proposed to the east of Ardenwood Boulevard. To the west and right next to Patterson Slough the proposal includes an active sports park with night lighting and a 2-acre dog park, an elementary school, and two churches, parking lots and a road. The development will physically destroy the open space and introduce nuisance species, night lights, and all the other negative impacts that occur when you locate massive development right next to natural areas.

What will it be Fremont? Tremendous restoration opportunity realized or squandered?

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BaylandsConservation Committee

The saga of industrial composting on Byxbee Park continues and gets worse. In February 2009 the City Council appointed a Blue Ribbon Task Force (BRTF) to study the composting issue. I served on it and attended all 36 meetings to represent Byxbee Park. The BRTF recommended anerobic composting on a non-park site and it recommended removing composting from the park. The City Council ignored the BRTF recommendations and concocted one of their own which goes back to using parkland - except now it will be an even more industrial operation with methane gas generators and box-like anerobic digesters in the viewshed of the park. All of this to avoid taking two truckloads

of compostables to Gilroy daily. Council has asked for more Staff analysis and that will be due back in January after a new Council is seated with four new members. In addition there has been some talk that a couple of members of the BRTF might circulate an initiative to require composting on parkland and by using this process avoid CEQA review. That’s quite a perverse view of environmental stewardship.

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An Incomplete Picture

Just like a landscape picture puzzle with missing pieces, our vision of protecting the bay is in peril. We are in danger of forever losing some pieces critical to completing the Refuge and maintaining biodiversity.

Former Refuge Manager Roy Lowe and Florence LaRiviere both participated in the process that led to the congressional approval of the Refuge expansion boundary and kindly agreed to share their recollections:

Here are Roy Lowe's thoughts:

While the original establishment of the 23,000 acre refuge was heroic, it became clear to many of us in the mid 1980's that there were still huge threats to habitat around the south bay and that some important habitats were not included in the original refuge boundary.

One of the major shortcomings of the original refuge establishment was the failure to include significant areas of upland and wetland transition habitat or very important seasonal wetlands and vernal pool habitats. The upland and wetland transition habitat is critical to the survival of the California clapper rails and the salt marsh harvest mouse because it provides escape cover during the high tides. Without this habitat these species are exposed to serious predation. The ability of large acres of tidal marsh to support these species could be greatly reduced due to the lack of high tide cover habitat. This really hit home for me when we conducted high tide airboat surveys of clapper rails and I saw how vulnerable they were. The seasonal wetland and vernal pools seemed to be on the leading edge of destruction as adjacent cities expanded development into these habitats and into farmlands. Looking back at the pace these areas were being developed, I believe we are lucky habitat of this type remains at all. The importance of these seasonal habitats to both plants and animals is well known. The refuge expansion boundary provides the opportunity to acquire and protect of some of these habitats that weren't within the original boundary and increase the options for habitat restoration.

One of the concerns I had was that I didn't think it was enough to rely on federal and state wetland regulations to protect the wetlands around the South Bay. Despite the strength of these regulations wetland losses still occurred. However, my biggest concern was the future. What problems would the Refuge be facing in 50 or 100 years? My simple answer is if you really want to protect habitat in perpetuity you need to own it and manage it.

Florence LaRiviere's recollections:

A small group of wetlands activists enlisted the help of our congressman, Don Edwards in the late 1960's. We asked if he would help us establish a wildlife refuge on the Bay because

our wetlands were disappearing under steel, concrete and asphalt at a dreadful rate. For five years, we went around the bay area talking to all kinds of groups to say, "This is what is happening to our special lands." I think it was four or five times that Mr. Edwards submitted his bill, so there was great elation when, in 1972, his legislation was signed into law by President Nixon.

We dusted off our hands, and settled back in satisfaction. But, we had actually acquired an extremely limited kind of habitat, mostly salt ponds. Where were the grasslands, where were the seasonal wetlands, where, indeed, were the tidal marshes? We had to fight development as it threatened each site. Finally, in 1985, after Bair Island had been saved from total development by The Friends of Redwood City, Rick Epstein, sitting at our dining room table said, "Hey, why don't we go back to Congress and get Bair Island and ALL the remaining wetlands into the Refuge?"

The reincarnated committee became known as The Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge.

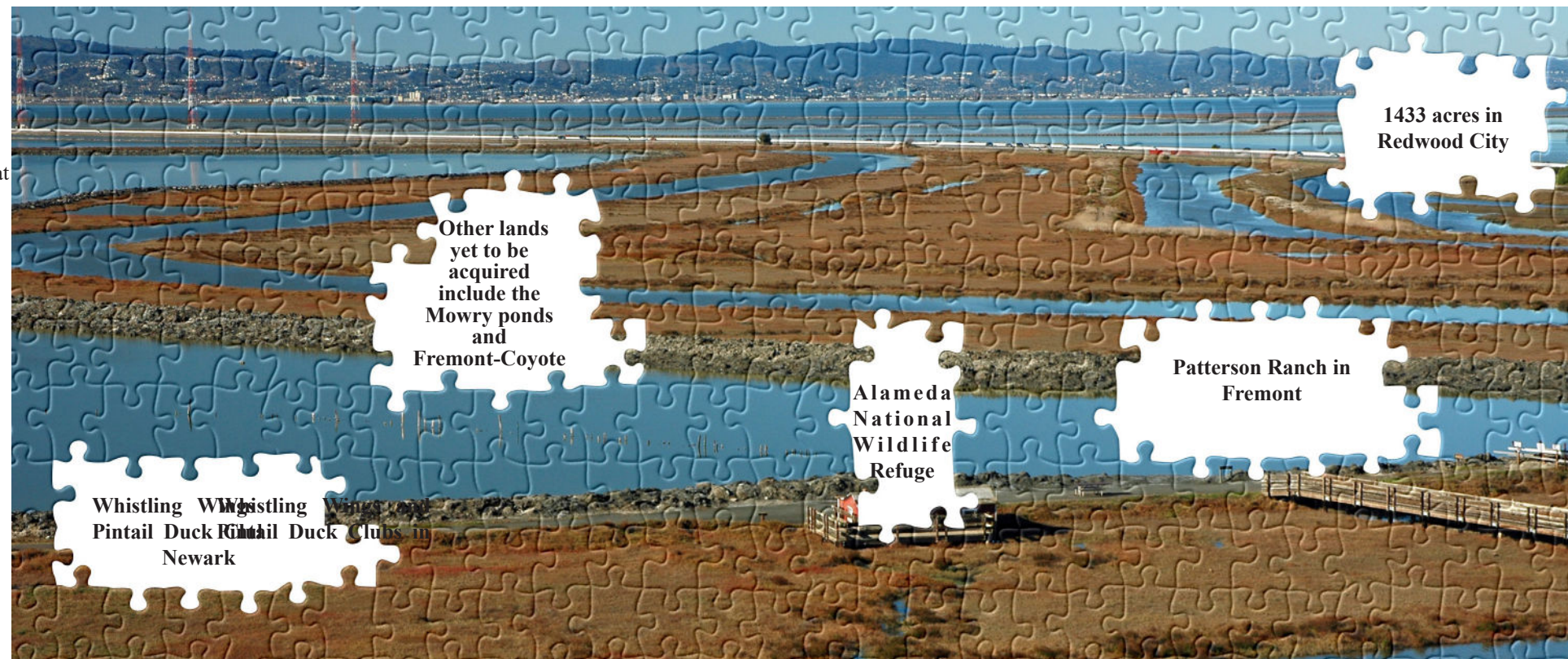
Mr. Edwards signed on with us once more, and the ordeal began again. We educated the public on the value of wetlands to the human population and to wildlife alike. We printed bumper stickers, put on slide shows, wrote letters to the newspapers, and collected signatures to support the expansion of the refuge.

The entire South Bay lay before us, and the question: what lands should be acquired? One hot summer day, we spread out maps all over a table upstairs at the Alviso Education Center. Those present were: Roy Lowe, of the Fish and Wildlife Service, Paul Kelly, of the California Department of Fish and Game, John Wade, of the Peninsula Open Space Trust --all wetland experts-- and Philip and I.

The lands identified that day became the basis for the legislation that was enacted in 1988, the first year it was submitted to Congress. There was a joyous celebration that October day when President Reagan signed into law the expansion of the Refuge.

From then on, it's been all up to us -- stopping development, finding willing sellers, and searching for funding.

Now, with the attainment of our goal within sight, the acquisition of the remaining lands is crucial.



Mouse art by Sam High



Just a few of the species who will benefit from protection of these lands.



Photo courtesy of Katherine Rambo



And Bay Area Residents too!

Friends of Redwood City

Cargill’s Redwood City salt ponds lie adjacent to Greco Island, a part of the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Restoration of these ponds represents an opportunity to expand the critical wildlife corridor between Bair Island and Ravenswood Point in Menlo Park, creating a valuable addition to the Refuge on the Peninsula. These Cargill ponds also represent an opportunity to increase habitat diversity within the Refuge system. Some of the ponds could be managed as saline pond habitat for nesting snowy plovers and least terns, with the remainder restored to salt marsh for species such as the clapper rail and salt marsh harvest mouse. Creating detention basins would provide much needed flood protection for the adjacent neighborhood as well as seasonal wetlands for migratory birds.

Cargill, however, seems to have other plans. Cargill’s developer, DMB, has submitted their “50/50” plan to the City of Redwood

City. Despite its catchy name, **this plan would only restore about 30%** of the 1400+ acres site to salt marsh. Massive bay fill would create a new “city” with 12,000 housing units, five schools and a million square feet of office buildings. A proposed four-lane road on the bay side of Highway 101 would funnel project traffic north to Whipple Avenue and south into Menlo Park.

Last January, at Cargill’s request, the City removed the ponds from the General Plan update currently underway. As a result, there has been no broad picture public dialogue on the community’s vision for the salt pond site. The City, however, is moving forward and is currently reviewing DMB’s application for completion.

Ralph Nobles
650-365-0675

Save Our South Bay Wetlands

Approaching on Alviso’s Grand Avenue, I slow the car to visually explore the wetlands, left and right, *before* entering the Refuge. Sometimes I stop and enjoy flocks of waders and shorebirds, a solitary egret, a wary burrowing owl or the lucky sighting of visiting phalaropes. Memorable past stops have allowed a snake to cross the road. On another occasion I was startled by the foraging dive of a peregrine falcon.

These “as is” wetlands are also known to illegal dumpers and their trash becomes the signage. But the lands were ranked in 1990 as high-value, Refuge expansion targets.

Just across the railroad track, on the Refuge, the New Chicago Marsh spreads before us, a reminder of planned development thwarted, and confirmed by recent survey as habitat of the salt marsh harvest mouse. Looking back across the tracks, to where I sit, are these closer wetlands also home for the endangered mouse?

San Jose’s shoreline is facing far too many threats to ignore the importance of Refuge expansion. The Santa Clara Valley Water District recently approved an Alviso Slough redevelopment project, dismissing funded Salt Pond Project actions that may make redevelopment expense unnecessary. The Alviso Marina Park’s new small-craft boat ramp opens access to a 4-mile waterway through the Refuge and sensitive habitats. The San Jose Chamber of Commerce is pursuing a costly and impractical Alviso ferry port that would have massive environmental impacts on the same slough. In Coyote Creek, the Newby Island landfill seeks a 280% expansion of operations that are the prime food-enablers for exploding, ecosystem-altering gull populations.

We must act now to protect what we have gained and to prevent further losses.

Eileen MacLaughlin
408-257-7599

Thank You For Your Continued Support



You have been wonderfully supportive of our efforts to protect important open space along the edges of the bay and beyond. Thank you!

Together we have successfully worked to ensure tens of thousands of acres of wildlife habitat will be protected now and for future generations. But as you can see from the articles in this Newsletter, there is a lot of hard work ahead. We have reached a critical juncture in time, one that will require we utilize all of our resources if we are to fulfill our goal of completing the Refuge.

This past year we have hired technical experts and attorneys to help us respond to environmental review documents, and we anticipate that need will grow in 2010. Our funding goal remains a modest \$25,000. With this sum we hope to put a stop to development proposals that put Bay Area residents and wildlife in harm’s way.

We know times are tough. We are grateful for whatever you can contribute. Every penny really does help.

The Uneasy Chair



This is a puzzle....

Now let me see--do I have this right? Over many years, starting about 1850, salt companies threw up levees around tens of thousands of acres of productive wildlife-rich tidal marshes along the Bay’s shores in order to produce salt by solar evaporation.

Isn’t the Bay a public resource? By what right can a profit-making organization partition off any part thereof for its own private gain? Unconcerned, the salt companies made money for themselves. Never mind the animals forced to the brink of extinction, or the loss to the people of flood control and water quality among the many benefits that wetlands provide.

Now, consider Redwood City’s 1,433 acres of ponds adjoining West Point Slough: following the progression from tidal marsh to salt ponds, we now have the owner (Cargill/DMB) adding insult to injury through their horrendous desires to build a city of at least 25,000. Some sources suggest the number could be as high as 30,000 people in pursuit of yet more money, BIG money.

Cargill doesn’t seem to understand that WE DON’T FILL SAN FRANCISCO BAY ANYMORE. With anything. And where is

the “give back” to the public for the use of its resources for years and years?

This is a pleasure.... The Honorable Don Edwards, the lion of the House of Representatives for 32 years, established our National Wildlife Refuge in 1972, and in 1988, with commitment and legislative skill, persuaded the Congress to expand that refuge to 43,000 acres. Now, to our delight, Congressman Edwards will be interviewed and videotaped by documentary filmmaker Miles Saunders and we will have a lasting record of the Congressman’s enormous contribution.

This is a challenge.... The goal of the Blue Goose Alliance is ours also--agency status for the refuge system within the Department of the Interior. Only then will refuges gain the importance and management they deserve.

This is a thank you.... For month to month support, I wish to thank Jane Stone, my volunteer reader and friend, and to our dear neighbors who come every month for the CCCR mailing: Gwen and David Jeong, Jean and Franklin Olmsted, and Joyce Todd. We could not make it without them.

Florence LaRiviere
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Thank you for your support -- you make it all possible!!	



Photo of Lange's Metalmark butterfly courtesy of Eric Palm

Editors note: A special "thanks" to Florence and Philip LaRiviere, and Howard and Sam High for their editorial assistance in the production of this newsletter. I would also like to invite our readers to view the new CCCR website at www.cccrrefuge.org. You can get updates on issues of concern to us, view previous editions of "Save Wetlands," and view a full color version of this edition of our newsletter. "Thank you!"

Save Wetlands is the Newsletter of the Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge, an all-volunteer nonprofit public benefit corporation.

The mission of the Committee is to save the Bay's remaining wetlands by working to place them under the protection of the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, and to foster worldwide education regarding the value of all wetlands.

Support is welcome from anyone interested in saving wetlands, for which a tax-deductible contribution of \$10 per issue would be appreciated.

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