SAVE WETLANDS

Newsletter of the Citizens Committee To Complete The Refuge

Newsletter Issue 40 Fall 2010

This spring an exciting discovery was made in the La Riviere Marsh - a healthy population of the rare Point Reyes Bird's Beak is thriving. This is testimony of what wonderous transformations can occur when former crystallizers, not unlike those in Redwood City, are restored.

LaRiviere Marsh supports saltmarsh, upland, and ecotone habitats and in turn listed species such as the California clapper rail and salt marsh harvest mouse.

For an excellent story regarding the discovery of the Point Reyes Bird's Beak (written by Brian Alfaro of the Refuge) please read the Winter 2010 edition of the Tideline Newsletter.

http://www.fws.gov/desfbay/tideline.htm

Photo courtesy of John Bradley USFWS

A heartfelt "Thank you!"

This year was particularly challenging. For the first time in our history we sent out a special appeal for help and you, our loyal supporters, were incredibly generous. We thank you. Your donations along with much appreciated grants from the Rose Foundation have enabled CCCR to use some extraordinary techniques to protect critical bay lands in Fremont, Redwood City and Newark.

Many of the lands within the congressionally approved Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge expansion boundary have been under aggressive assault - Patterson Ranch in Fremont, 1433 acres of salt ponds in Redwood City, and the lands that supported the former Whistling Wings and Pintail duck clubs in Newark.

While CCCR relies on its active volunteers to write comment letters, attend countless meetings, and to reach out to the community, this year we also needed to hire consultants and attorneys to provide expertise essential in our fight to protect these lands. The environmental review process for the Patterson Ranch project has ended (see details inside this issue). The local process for the duck clubs in Newark has also closed, but with your assistance we filed a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) lawsuit to try to correct the flawed environmental review of the duck clubs lands in Newark. We are currently in settlement discussions as required by the court.

There's still much to be accomplished. Preservation of the lands within the Refuge expansion boundary is crucial if we wish to preserve and sustain the biodiversity of our bay ecosystem as sea level rises.

The struggle to save the Redwood City saltponds continues and the environmental review process for the massive and ill-conceived development on lands that belong to the bay has begun. Now new storm clouds have appeared on the horizon. The San Jose Water Pollution Control Plant is beginning an environmental review process of a master plan that will impact 2600 acres of low-lying lands next to Coyote Creek and the Refuge, and there's the emergency access port proposal in Alviso that seems to periodically resurface like a bad penny.

We will continue our efforts to protect these lands to sustain rare and endangered species populations and for future generations to enjoy. We hope for your continued support. Your unwavering commitment to sustain the San Francisco Bay is an inspiration to all who fight in the trenches.

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The Rose Foundation

Photo by Sam High

Thank you Rose Foundation!
We'd like to express our deep appreciation to the Rose Foundation for its generous support of our efforts to protect lands along the edges of the Bay. CCCR continues to be a volunteer-based organization. Our members devote many hours writing substantive letters and attending countless meetings for the betterment of the environment. However, the generous grant received by the Rose Foundation has provided the means of hiring scientific and legal expertise in our efforts to protect listed species and the habitats that support them.

Citizens for Alameda's Last Marshlands

The Least Tern colony at Alameda NAS was successful in producing a good number of new birds. The exact number has not been released to the public, but it appears to be in the hundreds. It could have been greater, but for a pair of nesting red-tailed hawks on a nearby building. The red-tails found the tern chicks bite sized food for their baby red-tails. There was also a problem with peregrine falcons.

The Friends of Alameda National Wildlife Refuge have been busy with the help of volunteers in removing the tall weeds in and around the colony. The late rains produced some large growth of white clover -- up to five feet tall!

The Refuge's status with the Navy, Veterans Administration, City, USFWS, and EBRPD is still up in the air. There were changes in the Alameda City Council and San Leandro City Council, so we will have to see what "new ideas" for development of the area emerge.

In other "developing" news, Hayward's Shoreline Power Plant is supposed to begin construction soon.

Frank Delfino
(510) 537-2387

Computer art

by Sam High

Charleston Slough - Mountain View

Getting tired of reading "no progress" on Charleston Slough in the proliferation of marsh vegetation?

Our chairperson is the one who asked in amazement, "What's happened?" upon seeing in 1975 that the original cordgrass marsh in the inner slough was unrecognizable, being completely inundated.

The uncontrolled outer slough passes through one of the most luscious areas of marsh grasses to be seen on the Bay--but when it passes through the gates to the inner slough it's as if it had entered a basin of deadly poison.

A new development has entered the fray to tangle with the no vegetation problem and fix it! At this date, the Salt Pond Restoration Project people, i.e. the Fish and Wildlife Service and the Coastal Conservancy, along with the City of Mountain View, are taking a good look at Charleston Slough. BCDC's permit called for 50 acres of tidal marsh to be produced by some long-ago year.

With plans being developed for adjoining salt ponds, it is surely time to look at the surrounding area for restoration that will fit the Slough into the picture. We look forward with pleasure to follow the results of this effort.

Philip D. LaRiviere
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Save Wetlands In Mayhews

Look at the lands of Area 4 in Newark and you will find pickleweed and salt grasses still persist - tenacious plants that have held on through years of disking and plowing providing a home for the endangered salt marsh harvest mouse. Peek through the layers of soil and clay and discover the traces of historic sloughs and their meanderings. The margins of the bay once supported a richness of habitat that is disappearing - bulldozed under by development. But in some places like Area 4 a hint of that richness remains.

Area 4 stands as the one of the largest remaining pieces of undeveloped slough, wetland and upland habitats along the Bay's eastern shoreline. It is a site that still supports resident and migratory waterfowl and shorebirds, and sensitive species. Breaches along Mowry Slough could provide dampened tidal action, restoring wetlands. Fresh water springs contribute to fresh and brackish-water animal and plant communities whose habitats could be protected and enhanced. Native upland grasses could spring back to life providing refuge to marsh wildlife during high tide events. An abundance and diversity of wildlife that existed a mere fifty years ago could be restored.

Area 4 could provide a richness of wildlife and plants and teach us how wildlands can recover their former glory. Once again the autumn winds would carry the songs of throngs of ducks, migrant shorebirds and hawks. Burrowing owls would safely return to their nests with food for their young. The rhythm of nature would once again ring true in this special place.

Margaret Lewis
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Fremont

The majority of Patterson Ranch in northern Fremont lies within the congressionally approved refuge expansion boundary - for good reason. Patterson Ranch is adjacent to Coyote Hills Regional Park and in close proximity to the DESFBNW Refuge. No where along the central and south bay can one find such a diversity of habitats in such a small geographic footprint. The complex of habitats results in an abundance of wildlife including listed and rare species.

Patterson Ranch itself supports an extremely rare commodity - uplands that could be restored to native grasslands, remnants of a historic and unique willow grove that provides habitat for migratory and resident songbirds and raptors, and seasonal wetlands. All these are habitats that cannot easily be restored or created within the existing Refuge boundaries.

CCCR members have donated countless hours to protect these lands from development. Many were busy the entirety of this year writing letters, attending meetings, reaching out to the community in hopes of altering the Patterson Ranch project not for personal gain, but for the benefit of wildlife and current and future bay area residents. Our organization hired consultants to respond to environmental documents.

The good news is that the project was altered to remove the active sports park that was proposed west of Ardenwood Blvd., approximately 276 acres are supposed to be donated to East Bay Regional Park District, and the number of housing units to the east reduced to 500 units. The bad news is that it isn't clear the lands can safely support that number of housing units, the issue of how to fill the urgent need for additional schools is a work in progress, and most important - up to 50 acres to the west of Ardenwood Blvd. are not protected from development. We need to remain vigilant!

In the meantime - thanks to City of Fremont staff for removing the active sports park from the plans. And a very special thanks to all who slaved for many years to protect these critically important lands.

Carin High
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Baylands Conservation Committee

Many projects with impacts on the Palo Alto Baylands are underway. A feasibility study for an industrial anaerobic digester, which will be devastating to Byxbee Park, began in September. About the same time, proponents of the digester began collecting signatures for an initiative to undedicate 10 acres of Byxbee Park. The Master Planning for the Regional Water Quality Control Plant began in late October and the Landscape Planning for the RWQCP in late November. A refuse cost of service study is also underway. In addition, Palo Alto is planning for management of the Airport when that lease expires in 2017. All of these studies will impact Byxbee Park and the Palo Alto Baylands.

On November 22, the Council voted unanimously to close the landfill by the end of 2011. Rate-payers will save $5 million over a five year period when the City closes the landfill as planned, and the great news is that Byxbee Park will be completed and available to the public within about two years.

It will be up to those of us who care about the Baylands to pay attention and participate in these various studies and recommendations as they move along. Please contact me at the email below if you would like to get involved in protecting Byxbee Park, the main entrance to our precious baylands.

Emily M. Renzel, Coordinator
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"Imagine walking through a grassland and coming upon these magical pools ringed by a carpet of brilliant blue and yellow flowers." That's how Florence LaRiviere remembers her first encounter with the vernal pools of the Warm Springs Unit in the early 1990's.
Photo courtesy of Ivette Loredo, USFWS

The federally listed endangered Contra Costa goldfields. Some vernal pool plants rely on ground nesting solitary bees for their pollination making the protection of upland areas surrounding vernal pools important.
Photo courtesy of Ivette Loredo, USFWS

Pacific Commons - A New Addition to the Warm Springs Unit - Fremont

In the mid 1990's CCCR was involved in the fight to save the site now known as Pacific Commons in southern Fremont. The lands were known to have larges areas of seasonal wetlands and more importantly, these wetlands were unique - in addition to providing habitat for raptors, shorebirds, waterfowl, small mammals, amphibians, and reptiles, these particular wetlands provided habitat for federally listed and rare vernal pool species.

In 1999 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (COE) issued a permit to fill an unprecedented 46 acres of wetlands including wetlands that support the endangered vernal pool tadpole shrimp, endangered Contra Costa goldfields, and the California tiger salamander that was subsequently federally listed as threatened. To mitigate for the loss of listed species habitat and wetlands, the developer, Prologis (then Catellus) agreed to create a preserve of 391 acres of vernal pool complex capable of supporting the vernal pool tadpole shrimp and Contra Costa goldfields. It was required that Cushing Blvd. be elevated to provide continuity of habitat and that the developer first demonstrate that vernal pools could be created that would support the endangered tadpole shrimp.

In January 2008, approximately 440 acres at Pacific Commons became part of the Warms Springs Unit of the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). The vernal pool complex requires special management to protect the endangered and rare species associated with this unusual habitat.

Ivette Loredo, Manager of the Warm Springs Unit has been kind enough to provide the following description of the measures the Refuge has taken to protect and manage this wonderfully unique habitat along the edges of the bay.

Managing the Warm Springs Unit - Why are all those cows out there?

by Ivette Loredo, Don Edwards Warm Springs Unit Manager

Warm Springs Seasonal Wetland Unit (Warm Springs) of the Refuge is a vernal pool grassland that hosts a suite of rare species. Vernal pools are precipitation-filled topographic depressions that become inundated with water during the winter rainy season and then completely dry out in the summer. Vernal pools are home to a highly diverse and largely endemic flora and fauna, which are adapted to these annual cycles of inundation.

California's vernal pool ecosystems have been significantly fragmented and reduced in size by habitat alterations including urbanization, agricultural conversion, and non-native plant invasion. As a result, many of the endemic species that inhabit these vanishing wetlands are

experiencing population declines. Three such species that reside in Warm Springs are the federally endangered vernal pool tadpole shrimp and Contra Costa goldfield, and the federally threatened California tiger salamander.

In 1992, the 275-acre Warm Springs Unit was acquired by the Refuge. For most of the 20th century, Warm Springs was operated as a private duck club while being grazed by cattle. Upon acquiring the property, the Refuge ceased all grazing practices in the absence of a formal management plan. Early management activities were limited, and this decade of limited management allowed non-native annual grasses to accumulate in vernal pools, significantly altering plant communities. Refuge staff observed an apparent decline in abundance of native vernal pool plants and wildlife. The refuge began to research vernal pool management by consulting with vernal pool scientists and managers, and studying the available literature.

The habitat degradation at Warm Springs was consistent with information from other vernal pool ecosystems in which grazing was removed. Of course, changes to the habitat likely resulted from a complex interaction of several variables including historic land use, the abiotic environment, and annual climatic variation. However, the expansion of European annual grasses coincided with the suspension of grazing, suggesting that the lack of a disturbance regime was the primary factor in the reduction of native vegetation. Non-native annual grasses are highly productive resulting in heightened levels of plant biomass. Without disturbance, this biomass accumulates as litter (dead plant material left at the end of the growing season). Litter accumulation has been shown to decrease native plant diversity and abundance by altering germination conditions. In addition, litter buildup within and adjacent to vernal pools shortens inundation time, thus reducing available breeding habitat for vernal pool invertebrates and amphibians. Without a healthy disturbance regime to prevent litter buildup, the vernal pool ecosystem may not persist.

In 2004 a management plan for Warm Springs was completed; it included a rotational grazing regime supplemented with mowing, herbicide application, and prescribed burning to enhance the vernal pool grassland habitat. Grazing was reintroduced in 2004, and Warm Springs conducted its first prescribed burn in September of this year (2010). Monitoring results have been very encouraging, showing a decline in the abundance of non-native grasses and an increase in native vegetation. The refuge will continue to monitor the vegetation and wildlife at Warm Springs, and make management changes as necessary to adapt to changing conditions and new information.

[In 2008, the size of the Warm Springs unit nearly tripled with the addition of the Pacific Commons mitigation area.]

For more information about vernal pools you can visit:
www.sacsplash.org
www.vernalpools.org

The pond bottom in the cattle exclosure area at the bottom of this picture is fully vegetated with non-native grasses, but in the grazed area the endangered goldfields are present.

Photo by Chris Benton

Federally listed threatened California tiger salamander above
Endangered vernal pool tadpole shrimp below

Photos Courtesy of Ivette Loredo, USFWS

Friends of Redwood City

Despite widespread opposition to Bay development, Redwood City is moving forward with the CEQA process for the Cargill/ DMB Saltworks Project, the massive bay fill development plan that would place 12,000 housing units, five schools, office buildings and retail on 1,000 acres of salt ponds south of Seaport Blvd. The Notice of Preparation for the Saltworks EIR was issued in October, with written Scoping comments due in February.

Developer DMB's project documents and public outreach materials attempt to portray the Redwood City salt ponds as an industrial wasteland. Fortunately, the existing wildlife value of these salt ponds has been well documented.

Point Reyes Bird Observatory has data showing tens of thousands of shorebirds using the Redwood City salt ponds in the 1990's. A study in the 1980's by the US Fish and Wildlife Service also documents thousands of birds in all ponds and crystallizers. Last winter, Matt Leddy with the Friends of Redwood City photographed hundreds of shorebirds feeding and roosting on one of the ponds slated for development. On one weekend, he estimated 2700 shorebirds including willets, black-necked stilts, marbled godwits, dowitchers, dunlins, avocets and sandpipers were using the pond. Even the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board has commented on the existing habitat value of this site calling the Redwood City Salt ponds an "important biological resource".

Cargill informed the City that it would continue to make salt if the project isn't approved. This alternative should be completely described in the CEQA documents, including the benefits to wildlife. In addition, a full restoration alternative should also be evaluated. But, at the very least, the EIR for the Saltworks Project must accurately document the current environmental conditions for this site, reflecting the important wildlife habitat values that exist right now.

Gail and Matt Raabe
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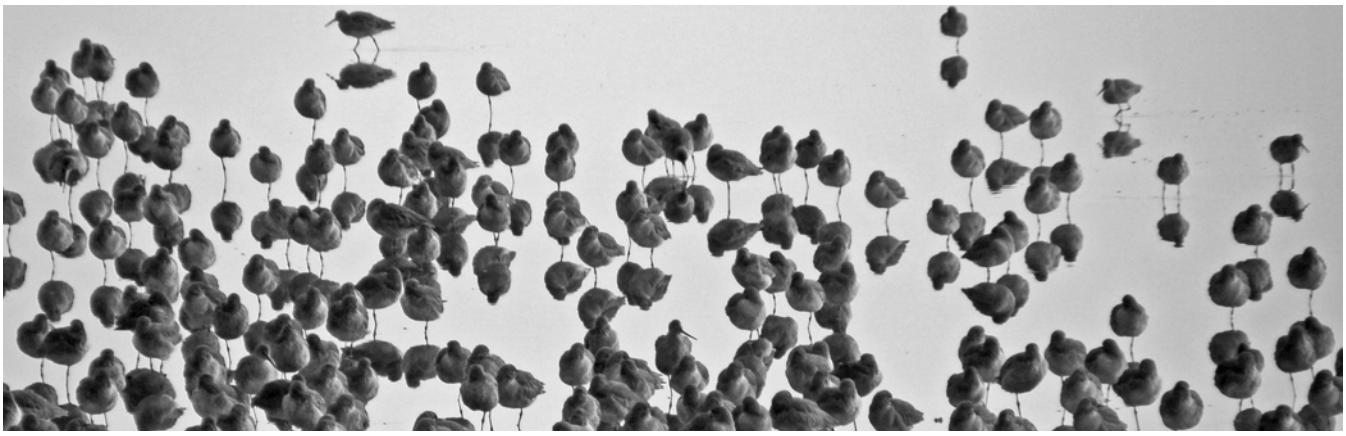

Redwood City Pond 10 Shorebirds

Photo by Carin High

Save Our South Bay Wetlands

Revived attention to the southernmost Bay shoreline has produced some progress. Newby Island Landfill actions have greatly reduced gull counts at the landfill itself. Pollution Control plant land-use planners have proposed enhanced wetlands. Refuge staff gained a Bay access point in Alviso Marina County Park.

But it's not party time. These projects are not done deals and new ones keep arising. All can significantly impact long-term biodiversity and integrity while proposed development is repeatedly juxtaposed with sea-level-rise, climate change and seismic hazards.

San Jose's release of the final EIR, expanding the Newby Island Landfill, is expected in early 2011. Will the EIR ensure that the gull reductions are permanent? Will the plan adequately address high susceptibility to seismic liquefaction and high water events?

At the San Jose/Santa Clara Water Pollution Control Plant, the November release of the draft plan for 2,600 acres has a public comment period to late January 2011. Are development decisions favoring jobs and revenue on filled wetlands lands really of greater economic value than long-term protection of plant operations and Alviso residents? Why was there no public opportunity to comment on a fully open-space option, to consider a sea-level-rise buffer and rare upland refugia? We intend to address this issue and other important concerns during the public comment period. Visit www.rebuildtheplant.org for more information.

Nearby, on Alviso Slough, the County Park boat ramp introduced new disturbances to clapper rails, harbor seals and a spectrum of wetland habitats as we predicted. Who is monitoring? Will public education ever reduce the need for helicopter rescues of tide-stranded boaters? On that same slough and at Moffett Field, development advocates are proposing ferry projects that require massive dredging and equally massive costs and impacts on habitats, wildlife and the Bay. Roll up your sleeves - this is no time to party.

Eileen McLaughlin
408-257-7599

The Uneasy Chair

In the mid-nineteen sixties, San Francisco Bay's lush and productive wetlands were being destroyed at a great rate. Levees had been thrown up for the production of salt. People turned the marshes into garbage dumps, airports, sewer outfalls and business parks.

Art Ogilvie, a planner for Santa Clara County, had an idea. He ran a little notice in the SJ Mercury News that attracted about thirty people to his office. We could save these lands forever, he thought, by getting the Federal government to designate our wetlands as a National Wildlife Refuge. That was the brilliant idea that inspired the formation of the first Refuge Committee.

The rest of the story is a model of democracy in action. We called on our Congressman, Don Edwards. His enthusiasm for the project and his political skill brought an ingenious plan to fruition. We got our refuge in 1972.

Now, forty-five years later, we find it hard to believe that there are still massive development proposals in the wetlands of Newark, Redwood City, Fremont and Alviso. The developers names are familiar--Cargill, Patterson, Peery and Arrillaga, among others.

We devote ourselves to the saving of these last remnant wetlands. They were mapped for acquisition after congress expanded the refuge in l988. Soon after that action, Federal and State scientists met with members of the public to map each acre that had to be kept to create a semblance of the biodiversity that once existed. Every day we recommit ourselves to this goal.

My heartfelt thanks to Tim Little and the Board of Directors of The Rose Foundation for their generous support and for their shared commitment to the preservation of the Bay marshes.

Rich Radigonda and the California Waterfowl Association have encouraged us tremendously with their plans for a gala event to support our work.

Month by month we have been aided by Jean and Franklin Olmsted, Gwen and David Jeong, Joyce Todd, and my devoted reader/friend, Jane Stone.

We are indebted to Kimberly and Todd, of the Copy Factory of Palo Alto. Their recognition of our non-profit status has helped us in many ways. Thank you..

Florence LaRiviere
florence@refuge.org

Name _____ **Phone** _____

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Here is my contribution to help preserve oour wetlands:

☐ **$10** ☐ **$20** ☐ **$50** ☐ **$100** ☐ **$**_____

May we use your name in a donor list with no reference to the amount donated? ☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

I would like to help by writing letters to save wetlands. Please add me to an e-mail ACTION ALERT LIST.
My e-mail address is _____

Please make your tax-deductible check payable to CCCR and mail your check and this form to the Committee at: 453 Tennessee Lane, Palo Alto, CA 94306.

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

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.

Photo by Sam High

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Save Wetlands is the annual 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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