

Levee project to restore habitat

Salt pond is reborn at Eden Landing after intentional breach

By Rachel Cohen, STAFF WRITER

October 27, 2006

HAYWARD — With a couple of deft digs from the excavator, a bulldozed levee bank was clawed away, allowing nearly 200 million gallons of Bay water to flood into a 300-acre former salt pond that has not seen the natural tide since the mid-1850s.

Within five years, the pond at Eden Landing Ecological Reserve, which lies to the south and in sight of the San Mateo Bridge, is expected to be restored to its natural vegetative marsh state. It is the result of a decades-long commitment and collaborative effort by the state Department of Fish and Game, the Wildlife Conservation Board and the East Bay Regional Park District.

"The slough channels and in the marshes are where productivity goes on for spawning and nurseries," said David Lewis, director of Save the Bay, an environmental restoration group that has been instrumental in volunteer community efforts. "A lot of people think of the birds and vegetation that you can see, but it's the invertebrates and fish that you can't see that feed these."

Many of the steelhead and salmon fingerlings that live in Alameda Creek, just to the west of the pond, will be able to grow protected in the new habitat so that they can compete in the Bay, creating a stronger fishery system.

Prior to the planned flood, six wells from the land's farming days were closed up to prevent the new Bay water from contaminating the water table.

The total 800-acre project cost nearly \$6 million over five years, which covered everything from initial planning and documentation to hands-on restoration and the building of one \$450,000 bridge for long-term park access, according to Carl Wilcox, a habitat conservation manager with the Department of Fish and Game.

The cities of Milpitas, San Jose and Fremont also contributed to a 1996 purchase.

Janice Delfino has been involved with restoration efforts for 33 years and said that former plans for the land included selling it for industrial, commercial and residential use.

She said that then-Hayward Mayor Ilene Weinreb decided in the 1980s that residents should find out what was under the mud.

"We don't want another Foster City," Delfino said. "There was a geo-chemical report that said this is young Bay mud, it's soft. You don't build on it."

After many letters, the land was purchased by the Wildlife Conservation Society and is now managed by the Department of Fish and Game.

Within a couple of years, the East Bay Regional Park District plans to have 21/2miles of Bay trail from Highway 92 on the northern end to Mt. Eden Shores on the south end of Hayward for hikers and bikers.

Lewis, of Save the Bay, added, "Many people in Hayward and Fremont may not have thought of their community as a shoreline community. This helps re-establish their connection."

Residents have another opportunity to voice their opinion concerning the conservation on the November ballot, which includes a bond under Proposition 84 that would provide

\$100 million for programs to help restore Bay lands, such as the levee breach and the planting of 5,000 native plants by volunteers over the next year.