

# SAN FRANCISCO BAY CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

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**TO:** Commissioners and Alternates

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**SUBJECT: Staff Report on Use of Social Media by the Commission**  
(For Commission consideration on June 16, 2011)

## Summary

As a part of its 2010 Strategic Plan, the Commission included an objective requesting the staff to define the purpose, study the feasibility and make recommendations regarding the use of social media in BCDC's public communication process. The staff has concluded its investigation of the issue and presents the following analysis.

## Staff Report

**Background.** In 2010, the State Legislature and Governor Schwarzenegger enacted AB 2408, establishing the cabinet-level California Technology Agency to lead the state's information technology (IT) program. In January 2011, the agency issued the *California Information Technology Strategic Plan*. Although, the plan does not require state agencies to establish or use social media in their operations, it requests that the state's IT community "continue to think creatively about how technology can improve services...and fulfill constituent expectations, while also rising to meet the obligations of state government." The plan presents three overarching goals: (1) Make Government Transparent, Accessible and Secure; (2) Drive Innovation and Collaboration; and (3) Make Information Technology Reliable and Sustainable Through Consolidated Platforms and Shared Services. One strategy for meeting Goal No. 1 is to "open new channels to provide services to Californians," including through the "use [of] social media and collaboration tools to connect to and engage Californians." As of December 2010, a survey of 368 State of California agencies showed that fewer than half had email, 88 agencies had Twitter sites, 72 had Facebook pages; 70 had YouTube accounts; and 54 maintained RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feed sites.

**Social Media Overview.** *The Social Media Bible* defines social media as "activities, practices, and behaviors among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge, and opinions using conversational media. Conversational media are web-based applications that make it possible to create and easily transmit content in the form of words, pictures, videos, and audios." Popular applications include: Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, RSS (Rich Site Summary), digg, Open311, Flickr, and LinkedIn. Table 1 (attached) summarizes the basic attrib-



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utes of some popular social media venues.

Social media users have increased significantly over a relatively short period. In 2000, approximately 361 million people used the internet and 750 million used mobile phones. Today, there are two billion internet users and over five billion with mobile phones. Facebook, launched only seven years ago, has over 650 million users—155 million of which reside in the U.S. Over 200 million “tweeps” follow Twitter, launched in 2006. As the number of fixed telephone landlines continues to decline and the number of internet and mobile phone users continues to rise, interest in and use of social media will likely continue to rise—until superseded by the “next big thing” in information technology.

It is becoming increasingly common to participate in important social and political revolutions via social media, such as the election results and political demonstrations in the Middle East. In matters perhaps less dramatic yet relevant to Californians, status reports concerning the Oakland-San Francisco Bay Bridge east span construction reports are “tweeted” by the California Department of Transportation via Twitter and news about Bike to Work Day is posted by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission via Facebook. Further, in 2010, 16% of Californians paid their taxes online, while over five million used the Department of Motor Vehicle’s website to renew their driver’s licenses.

**Social Media and the State of California.** Social media sites are only as popular as their ease-of-use, relevancy, and immediacy. In addition, a site’s reputation is built, in part, by providing accurate information and ensuring user security. In 2010, the State of California issued the *Social Media Standard* (SIMM 66B), which provides a framework for state agencies to consider and encourages individuals who manage and monitor social media sites to be properly trained and knowledgeable about their roles, responsibilities and security risks. Beyond this, the state has yet to issue formal social media standards and, therefore, the creation and on-going management of sites has been left to the individual state agencies and their in-house expertise and staffing resources.

**Purpose and Feasibility of Social Media in BCDC’s Work.** The Commission continues to communicate with its constituents, interested parties, staff and other regulatory agencies primarily through traditional media, such as phone, paper correspondence and reports, fax, face-to-face contact, and email. In 2008, however, the Commission launched its website, which provides information related to its mission and day-to-day business, including publications, permit applications, planning reports, contact information, and meeting materials and summaries. The website has become an increasingly common way of learning about BCDC and accessing information and, thus, increasingly relevant to the Commission’s day-to-day operations.

In April 2011, the Commission’s staff set up a photo-sharing platform (Flickr) where Bay Area residents could post photos showing the effects of a “king tide” event—the results of which helped to illustrate what the shoreline might look like as sea level continues to rise. These images, many of which were dramatic, generated public and media interest resulting in a news broadcast featuring the Commission’s staff. This experience illustrates that not only can social media tools serve the purpose of communicating with the Commission’s constituents and perhaps beyond, but also that their use is feasible.

To better understand other potential purposes of social media tools in the Commission’s work, the staff surveyed several state agencies with social media sites. State Parks finds social media platforms to be “invaluable” as promotional tools, for connecting with constituents, for

broadcasting emergency information (e.g., park closures), and for conveying real-time information to those who would otherwise obtain it via phone or email, such as journalists. State Parks also believes that using social media helps to re-frame a common perception that government is “[un]approachable or [un]friendly.” According to CalRecycle, an added advantage of exposure via Facebook or Twitter is the potential for “inexpensive advertising” and indirect exposure to “friends of friends,” who might otherwise be unfamiliar with the agency. The California Coastal Commission maintains a Facebook and Twitter page focused solely on its public education efforts, e.g., Coastal Clean-Up or Adopt-a-Beach events. Further, the Coastal Commission’s staff is presently assessing whether and how to expand the use of social media to others parts of its coastal management program. To summarize the comments of a staff member, people are starting to expect agencies to be accessible via social media sites, making it difficult *not* to move in this direction.

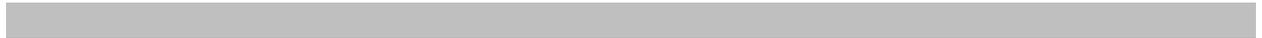
The staff believes that the Commission could benefit by using social media tools to enhance its public information and outreach, expand its constituent base, raise local and international awareness about its work, create a venue for an open and dynamic conversation about Bay issues, post images, and improve collaboration with partners. Further, a select group of sites could serve various purposes:

1. **Facebook:** Both a page and a profile could provide information about BCDC (e.g., history, mission, website link, current issues), public meeting announcements, photos, and links to partners or issues of interest. All constituents could access BCDC’s page, including those without Facebook accounts. Anyone could “like” the Commission and, thus, automatically receive postings. Registered Facebook users could become a “friend” of the Commission and also engage in conversations on the Commission’s wall—a dialogue or public forum that could be managed (i.e., responded to and/or deleted) by the Commission. A Facebook page could include a link to YouTube for posting photos and potentially videos. The Commission could access the profiles of its “friends.” Links to the Commission’s Facebook page could include the BCDC website, the State of California website, and BCDC publications.
2. **Twitter:** A BCDC Twitter site would post brief (i.e., 140 characters) messages and links to relevant information, such as websites, videos, partner agencies, and public meetings. Those not formally registered with Twitter could see Commission “tweets”, but could not converse with other registered users. The Commission could manage Twitter dialogues. Because this media tool is well-suited for emergency communication, for purposes of the Commission, it could be used in the event of a storm or earthquake where immediate information is needed, e.g., emergency permits, if the internet were to be accessible. However, a Facebook page or profile with links for accessing real-time information could serve a similar purpose.
3. **YouTube:** With a YouTube account, the Commission could post videos of lectures, meetings, and symposia. Links to these videos could also be posted on Facebook and Twitter sites. Comments by registered YouTube users could be posted and monitored by the Commission staff.
4. **RSS:** The Commission could maintain a RSS site for publishing time-critical information to registered subscribers, e.g., journalists, academicians, interested parties, and partners. Although such sites are used for “feeding” information and are not interactive, outgoing information would likely generate discussion. A Facebook page or profile with links for

accessing real-time information could serve a similar purpose.

In growing beyond the Commission's single experience of using a photo-sharing site, the feasibility of using social media becomes more complicated. In the absence of formal standards set by the state, the creation and management of sites is solely left to agencies and their staff. While setting up sites can be relatively easy and quick – taking anywhere from one to 25 hours as is the case for State Parks, which maintains multiple social media sites and blogs – site management and maintenance is not, taking as much as 30 hours per week in the case of State Parks. In addition, sites require some degree of monitoring to avert problems around privacy issues, security breaches, and dissemination of offensive or incorrect information. In short, while it appears feasible to create sites and manage sites for discrete events, e.g., the April 2011 king tide, expanding beyond that requires time, resources, and expertise.

**Recommendations.** As evidenced by the growing interest and use of social media tools and the Commission's limited yet positive experience to date in using such tools, and recognizing current staffing and resource limitations, the staff recommends the following:

1. The Commission should continue to use social media tools, such as Flickr, for promotional and educational purposes for discrete Bay-related events;
  2. The Commission staff should consider developing an agency-specific social media plan which, at a minimum: (a) defines the agency's goals for using social media sites and identifies the target audience; (b) identifies the most appropriate social media platform(s) for the agency's purpose and considers appropriate messaging and content; and (c) identifies potential operational risks (e.g., privacy and security breaches) and potential mechanisms for addressing the risks;
  3. The Commission's staff should continue to keep abreast of social media guidance, policies, and standards issued by the California Technology Agency as it applies to the creation and management of social media sites for state agencies; and
  4. The Commission's staff should continue to communicate and collaborate with other state agencies to understand how best to broaden the use of social media tools in its coastal management program.
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**Table 1**

<b>Facebook</b>	<b>Twitter</b>
<p>A social network provider for presenting information (e.g., photos, videos, website links, an organization’s goals and mission, meeting time and place) and facilitating conversation. A “page” or “profile” is created by registered users, which can be viewed by other registered users and the general public. A page is informational while a profile is both informational and interactive. Users can “like” a page, but only registered Facebook users can be a “friend”. By liking an organization, one receives “postings” automatically, which are also displayed on one’s profile or “wall.” “Friends” can comment or converse about postings, which can be managed by the profile’s host. Profiles of “friends” –with varying amounts of information available for viewing–can be accessed by registered users.</p>	<p>A form of micro-blogging to communicate a message (“tweet”) not exceeding 140 characters. A registered user/host or “twitterer” posts messages that are public (accessible to anyone) or restricted to subscribers or “followers” maintaining twitter accounts. Followers receive real-time postings and post responses to messages, which can be managed by a site’s host.</p>
<b>RSS (Really Simple Syndication) – News Feed Platform</b>	<b>Open 311</b>
<p>A category of tools used to automatically “feed” current information (full or summarized text) from specific websites or other internet-based media to subscribers.</p> <p><b>digg</b> is a news feed platform where news is posted and voted on by users, and where the most popular stories become the most visible, widely-shared, and discussed amongst other users.</p>	<p>Like the traditional 3-1-1 phone-based platform, this web-based system provides an open forum for citizens to report non-emergency public issues and their location, e.g., a pothole or graffiti at the corner of North and Vine. Users can interact directly with the government and have an open conversation about the issue with other users. Once reported, the issue is routed to the appropriate authority to address the problem. The open model is intended to make it easier to collect information, enhance transparency, and increase accountability.</p>
<b>YouTube</b>	<b>Podcasts</b>
<p>A platform to upload, view, and comment on videos. Unregistered users can view videos, but not upload or comment. A registered host can monitor and manage comments.</p>	<p>A podcast is a series of digital media files (either audio or video) that are released episodically and often downloaded through web syndication.</p>