

San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission

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TO: All Design Review Board Members

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SUBJECT: South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project Phase 2 Public Access
(For Design Review Board consideration on April 17, 2017)

Project Summary

Applicants. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and California State Coastal Conservancy (SCC).

Project Representatives. John Bourgeois and Brenda Buxton, SCC; Chris Barr, USFWS; Dillon Lennebacker, AECOM; Dave Halsing, Environmental Science Associates (ESA).

Project Site. The South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project (SBSP Restoration Project) covers 15,100 acres of the USFWS Don Edwards Wildlife Refuge, and includes three former salt pond complexes located in the southern portions of San Francisco Bay. The three pond complexes include: (1) Eden Landing Ponds, located along the eastern side of the Bay, adjacent to Union City and the San Mateo Bridge (Alameda County); (2) Ravenswood Ponds, located on the western side of the Bay, bordered by Redwood City and adjacent to the north side of the Dumbarton Bridge, with one pond just south of the bridge (San Mateo County); and (3) the Alviso Ponds which rim the southern extent of the Bay, south of Dumbarton Bridge and adjacent to the cities of Mountain View, Sunnyvale, Santa Clara, San Jose, Milpitas and the southern end of Fremont (Alameda and Santa Clara Counties) (Figure 1).

The SBSP Restoration Project is multi-phased, with Phase 1 now complete (2013) and Phase 2 in the permitting stage and the subject of this report. Phase 2 would take place at four pond clusters within the Alviso and Ravenswood Pond Complexes and would complete the restoration of an additional 2,200 acres of former industrial salt-production ponds to Bay habitat as follows (Figure 2).

The Alviso Pond Complex has three pond clusters included in Phase 2:

- The 480-acre Alviso–Island Ponds (Ponds A19, A20, and A21);
- The 570-acre Alviso–A8 Ponds (Ponds A8 and A8S); and
- The 700-acre Alviso–Mountain View Ponds (Ponds A1 and A2W).

The Ravenswood Pond Complex has only one pond cluster included in Phase 2 referred to as:

- The 625-acre Ravenswood Ponds (R3, R4, R5, and S5).

There is no proposed action at the Eden Landing Ponds at this time.

Background. In 2003, the USFWS and CDFW, in partnership with the SCC acquired the South Bay Salt Ponds from Cargill Salt. Following the acquisition, an interim management plan was prepared and federal and state agency partners launched a four-year public process to design the restoration plan. Since the project is so large and would potentially change Bay natural processes, wildlife use, and flood conditions, the project is being conducted in phases, with adaptive management opportunities built into each phase. After Phase 2, additional phases will be implemented. The project goals are to: (1) restore and enhance a mix of habitats; (2) provide wildlife-oriented public access and recreation; and (3) provide flood management for the South Bay.

Phase 1 implementation began in 2009 and was completed in 2013. It included restoration of 1,600 acres of tidal marsh habitat; 1,440 acres of muted tidal habitat, 710 acres of reconfigured ponds incorporating bird nesting islands and dry pannes for endangered snowy plovers; the development of 7 miles of new public trails; a kayak launch ramp; and viewing platforms and interpretive displays at all three pond complexes (Figures 3–6).

The proposed Phase 2 project is in the Commission’s salt pond, shoreline band and Bay jurisdictions. The environmental review as been completed through a joint Environmental Impact Statement/Report (EIS/EIR)¹ and is currently in the permitting process with construction planned for 2018 (BCDC Application No. 2017.005.00 and Consistency Determination No. C2003.010.07).

In the environmental review process, the project sponsors evaluated public access at these sites, and alternate public access trail locations and lengths, as well as numbers and locations of viewing platforms at the Alviso-Mountain View Ponds and the Ravenswood Ponds. No public access alternatives were evaluated at the Alviso-Island Ponds due to safety issues associated with access to the site. Alternatives were not evaluated at Alviso-A8 Pond because public access at that location is planned for a future phase.

The public access alternative chosen for the Alviso-Mountain View Ponds includes three viewing platforms, all on the project property. A fourth viewing platform was included in one alternative, but off the project site and was proposed only if the proposed project included an additional parcel, Charleston Slough. Charleston Slough was not included in the project and therefore, neither was the additional viewing platform. In addition, one alternative included a longer trail segment around Pond A2W. The trail currently proposed is shorter, but still terminates in a viewing platform. The trail was shortened to balance wildlife use, cost and view considerations.

The public access alternative chosen for the Ravenswood Ponds included variations of an additional trail spur and viewing platform, either on top of a water control structure or on a portion of the levee extending from the northeast corner of Bedwell Bayfront Park. The alternative chosen does not include this viewing platform or trail spur because the levee in this area will be lowered to allow tidal flows in to the site.

¹ South Bay Salt Pont Restoration Project Final Environmental Impact Statement/Report, Phase 2

Existing Public Access. Currently public access amenities are available at or near each of the Phase 2 pond clusters, and are consistent with USFWS Refuge policies. A rough estimation of the current use of the Refuge is 200-300 people per day, and approximately 100 to 150 people per pond cluster per day. Existing public access at each pond cluster includes the following amenities (Figure 7):

Alviso-Island Ponds (Figure 7) (this cluster is not safely accessed from land):

- Pond A19 offers in-season waterfowl hunting access by shallow-draft boats; and
- Boating and fishing are allowed in the adjacent tidal sloughs and Bay.

Alviso-Pond A8 (Figure 7)

- In-season waterfowl hunting is allowed on selected days from boards or the levees; and
- Boating is allowed in adjacent tidal sloughs and Bay.

There is no fishing allowed in the above refuge ponds due to mercury issues and there are no existing trails on the levees around these ponds.

Alviso-Mountain View Ponds (Figure 8)

- Ponds A1 and A2W are immediately adjacent to the City of Mountain View's Shoreline Park, where public amenities include a number of trails, including a segment of the Bay Trail, viewing areas, a golf course, a sailing lake, a kite-flying hill, and a dog park;
- A spur of the Bay Trail is located along the eastern side of Stevens Creek and immediately opposite Pond A2W;
- The City of Mountain View maintains a viewing platform at the southern edge of nearby Charleston Slough where the Bay Trail proceeds along the slough's western levee;
- To the east of these ponds, in-season waterfowl hunting is allowed in Ponds A2E and AB1;
- Public parking is available inside Shoreline Park, and along the length of Terminal Blvd (near Coast Casey forebay).

Ravenswood Ponds (Figure 17)

- Ponds R5, S5, and R4 is located adjacent to the City of Mountain View's Bedwell Bayfront Park, which contains an extensive network of trails;
- The Bay Trail extends along the southern border of this pond cluster, with a loop trail around the nearby Facebook campus;

- Ponds R1 and R2 are adjacent to Ravenswood Trail;
- Pond SF2 has a boardwalk trail;
- Kayaking and other boating is allowed in the sloughs adjacent to the ponds; and
- A public parking lot is located adjacent to Pond S5 and the entry to Bedwell Bayfront Park.

Proposed Public Access. The public access improvements proposed for Phase 2 are as follows:

1. **Alviso-Island Ponds and Alviso-A8 Ponds.** No public access improvements are proposed at these ponds during Phase 2 of the project. The Island Ponds can not be safely accessed by the public, and the levees around them are expected to decay over time. The longer-term plan for the A8 Ponds includes the completion of the Bay Trail spine along the southern border of this pond group during a later phase of the restoration (Figure 7).
2. **Alviso-Mountain View Ponds (Figures 8 -16).** Three viewing platforms and two new trails along existing and improved levees, each with connections to the existing Bay Trail spine and to the trail network inside the City of Mountain View's Shoreline Park would be developed. Unless otherwise noted, the trails are designed for multiple uses and would be constructed with a hard-packed aggregate surface. Moving from west to east within the project boundaries, the following public access amenities will include:
 - a. **Existing Trail and Viewing Platform (EV).** For flood protection purposes, the project proposes to raise a portion of an existing levee along the southern edge of Charleston Slough where the Bay Trail spine and an existing viewing platform are located. Following the levee work, the Bay Trail spine would be repaved and restriped to be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and match the current conditions. To reconnect the trail to the existing wooden viewing platform (EV), a paved ADA-compliant ramp would be constructed, which would slope down from the raised levee and connect to the platform. The ramp would have appropriate turning radii at key points (Figures 8, 10 & 11).
 - b. **New Trail and Viewing Platform (V1).** On top of an improved levee between Charleston Slough and Pond A1, the project proposes to construct a new, ADA-compliant trail approximately 1,000 feet in length that would terminate at a proposed viewing platform (V1). The width of the proposed levee-top trail is 10-12 feet, with two-foot-wide shoulder, and be surfaced with an aggregate base with polymer stabilizer. The trail would provide views of the planned marsh restoration action in Pond A1 and the intertidal mudflat in Charleston Slough.

The proposed viewing platform (V1) measures approximately 830 square feet and would consist of a widened and graded levee top to accommodate two sets of benches and two interpretive panels. One set of benches would face west towards Charleston Slough and the other set would face east towards Pond A1. To the northeast of the viewing platform, a chain link fence would be placed to limit human and predator access to the larger restoration site (Figures 8, 10, 12 & 13).

- c. **Proposed Viewing Platform (V2).** Currently, the Bay Trail spine runs along the southern edge of Pond A1. Approximately 525 feet to the west of Permanente Creek, a proposed viewing platform (V2) would be constructed. The platform would measure approximately 440 square feet and have an aggregate base surface and a slight increase in elevation (~1-2 feet) from the Bay Trail. Proposed amenities include 2 benches and two interpretive panels and allow viewing of Pond A1 as it transitions to marsh (Figures 8, 10 & 14).
- d. **Proposed Trail and Viewing Platform (V3).** A 1.1-mile trail would be built atop an improved levee at the eastern edge of Pond A2W and end at a proposed viewing platform (V3) adjacent to the Bay. The trail would begin at the intersection of the existing Bay Trail spine and the Stevens Creek trail. Views along the trail include Pond A2W as it transitions to tidal marsh to the west, and of Stevens Creek and an existing fringe marsh to the south. The viewing platform (V3) would allow views of open water habitat. The proposed multiple-use trail would be ADA-compliant, 10 to 12 feet wide and have an aggregate base surface and two-foot shoulders on either side. Two bridges are proposed along the trail to cross levee breaches to Stevens Creek (Figures 15-16).

At the terminus of the Pond A2W trail, the proposed viewing platform (V3) would have a widened and graded levee top area to accommodate two benches and an interpretive panel. This proposed platform would provide a 360-degree view of a range of habitats, including the Bay, Pond A2W, to Stevens Creek, and to the existing marsh and Pond A2E.

- 3. **Ravenswood Ponds (Figures 17–20).** As proposed, the Phase 2 actions at the Ravenswood Ponds would construct 0.5 of public trails connecting to the Bay Trail and to an existing trail network inside the City of Menlo Park's Bedwell Bayfront Park. A proposed viewing platform (V4) would provide a unique opportunity to see three different types of ongoing habitat restoration activities.
 - a. **Proposed Trail.** The north-south aligned levee that extends between the southeastern corner of Bedwell Bayfront Park and the Bay Trail located adjacent to Pond R3 and along the managed wetlands R5 and S5 would be raised and a 0.5 mile, ADA compliant trail would be constructed. The trail would be surfaced with aggregate base with polymer stabilizer and measure 10 to 12 feet-wide, with two-

foot shoulders. The trail would have post and cable fencing along the sides to deter human intrusion into the adjacent habitat. The trail would connect a number of existing trails and complete a loop trail around Ponds R5 and S5. The Bay Trail connection would lead directly into the USFWS Refuge and would be gated and signed appropriately to control entry (Figures 17 & 19).

- b. **Proposed Viewing Platform (V4).** Near the mid-point of the proposed trail, an approximately 9,960 square foot viewing platform would be built at grade. The proposed platform (V4), it would consist of a widened area of the levee, surfaced with aggregate base. It would be located at the intersection of four ponds, and would provide views of the restoring tidal marsh in Pond R4, enhanced dry salt panne habitat for western snowy plover in Pond R3, and shallow water managed ponds for small shorebirds and waterfowl in Ponds R5 and S5, providing a unique perspective due to the elevation and habitat diversity. Three sets of benches at this platform would face different habitat types, and signage and interpretive panels would provide information on the habitats, wildlife, and the restoration processes. Immediately to the east of the proposed viewing platform a fence to deter human and predator intrusion into the habitat would be installed (Figures 17, 19 & 20).

Dogs are not allowed within the Refuge and would not be allowed on the trails or viewing platforms.

Public Access Policies and Design Guidelines. The project proponents propose a suite of improvements to be carried out during Phase 2 of the SBSP Restoration Project. The Board's advice is sought regarding the proposed design and the following applicable San Francisco Bay Plan (Bay Plan) policies and BCDC's Public Access Design Guidelines (Guidelines).

Bay Plan Policies

1. **Public Access.** The policies state in part that public access to the Bay should be provided for projects involving fill, including at wildlife areas, except in cases where access would be inconsistent with the project or result in significant conflicts, including unavoidable, significant adverse effects on natural resources. Further, the policies state partly that public access to natural areas should be provided, though it acknowledges that some wildlife are sensitive to human intrusion. Therefore, projects should be carefully evaluated to determine the appropriate location and type of access to be provided, and should be sited, designed and managed to prevent significant adverse effects on wildlife.
2. **Salt Pond Restoration.** The Bay Plan Salt Ponds policies state in part that design and evaluation of projects that would restore, enhance or convert salt ponds to subtidal or wetland habitat should include an analysis of "[s]iting, design and management of public access to maximize public access and recreational opportunities while avoiding significant adverse effects on wildlife;..."

3. **Flooding and Sea Level Rise.** The policies related to future flooding at public access areas state in part that public access should be sited, designed, managed and maintained to avoid significant adverse impacts from sea level rise and shoreline flooding.

The Design Guidelines. The applicable Guidelines state that public access spaces should be public and usable; maintain and enhance public views to the Bay; provide connections and connectivity to existing parks and open space; take advantage of Bay settings; and be compatible with wildlife.

1. **Public and Usable.** The Guidelines state in part that shoreline access should be developed so that the San Francisco Bay Trail or shoreline path is the primary design element, and use site furnishings, (e.g., benches, trash containers and lighting) to provide visual cues that the shoreline space is available to the public. Project should also include interpretation of historical, cultural or natural attributes of the site.
2. **Maintain and Enhance Public Views, and Bay Setting.** The Guidelines state in part that visual access to the Bay should be provided, maintained and improved, and that the visual quality of the Bay and shoreline should be maintained and enhanced. Further, to take advantage of the Bay setting, views should be oriented to the Bay.
3. **Connections and Continuity.** The Guidelines state in part that shoreline public access should connect to parks and other public open space, and provide connections perpendicular to the shoreline at regular intervals for physical and view access.
4. **Compatible with Wildlife.** The Guidelines also state that siting, design and management strategies should ensure that access is compatible with wildlife uses. Compatibility can be accomplished through the analysis of habitat and wildlife use of the site; using buffers or use restrictions to reduce or prevent adverse human and wildlife interactions; planning for a balance between the needs of wildlife and people on an area wide scale; and should be provide designated areas and avoid habitat fragmentation, vegetation trampling and erosion. Predator access and control should also be evaluated in the public access design.

Board Questions

The Board's advice and recommendations are sought on the following considerations regarding the design of the proposed public access:

1. Are the proposed improvements sufficient and appropriate given the site's location and existing and anticipated use by the public?
2. Are the number of benches and interpretive sign features appropriate given the anticipated use? Should other amenities be included, e.g., trash cans, shade canopies, etc.?
3. Is the public access designed in such a way that it is adaptable to sea level rise?

The Board's advice and recommendations are sought on the following considerations regarding public views:

1. Are the viewing platforms appropriately sited and oriented to best enhance and take advantage of the views of the Bay and shoreline?
2. Are the amenities (benches and interpretive signage) provided sufficient and compatible with the Bay setting and site use?

The Board's advice and recommendations are sought on the following considerations regarding public access connections:

1. Are the connections to the regional parks trails and Bay Trail sufficient?

The Board's advice and recommendations are sought on the following considerations regarding Wildlife Compatibility:

1. Does the proposed design contain the necessary elements and features to ensure wildlife compatibility? Should additional measures be included to prevent human and wildlife use conflicts?
2. Is proposed fencing design and appearance appropriate given its primary purpose—to protect wildlife from human and predator intrusion?