

**San Francisco Bay Joint Venture  
Restoration Strategy/Technical Committee  
Thursday, February 15, 2007 10:30 am – 1:30 pm  
State Coastal Conservancy Office  
1330 Broadway, 13th floor meeting room**

*In attendance:* Marc Holmes, Chair, The Bay Institute; Nicole Athearn, US Geological Survey; John Brosnan, Sonoma Land Trust; Roy Churchwell, San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory; Jessica Hamburger, Bay Conservation and Development Commission; Catherine Hickey, PRBO Conservation Science; Gillian O'Doherty, NOAA Restoration Center; Brad Olson, East Bay Regional Parks District; Christina Sloop, Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation; Kate Symonds, US Fish and Wildlife Service; Isa Woo, US Geological Survey.

**Staff:** Beth Huning, Coordinator; Sandy Scoggin, Assistant Coordinator; Caroline Warner, Public Outreach Coordinator.

## **1. Welcome and Introductions**

## **2. South Bay Salt Pond Science Presentations**

The committee heard presentations on some of the science work being done as part of the South Bay Salt Pond project.

The presentations included overviews of the restoration project, discussion of potential implications of various restoration scenarios, and specific findings about the various groups of birds that currently utilize South Bay habitats. Roy Churchwell presented monitoring and research of the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory and Nicole Athearn presented for the US Geological Survey. This work, along with previously presented PRBO work (see [South San Francisco Bay Habitat Conversion Model](#) at <http://www.prbo.org/cms/index.php?mid=131> for the current report) provides important information to be used by project managers in restoration planning and adaptive management of the project.

Some key points and findings from these presentations include:

### ***San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory, Roy Churchwell***

#### **Overview:**

- About ½ million migrating shorebirds pass through the South Bay each year.
- The population of Clapper Rails in the South Bay is approximately 600.
- The majority of the Snowy Plover population is at Eden Landing.
  - The Snowy Plover population is declining likely due to increased predation, probably avian predation from harriers and gulls.
  - All breeding Snowy Plovers in the South Bay are within the restoration project.
- Tern populations have declined since surveys were started in the early 1980's, but the California Gull population has grown exponentially.
  - > 95% of the Gulls in the South Bay during the summer are California Gulls.
  - Population is now estimated at over 33,000 breeding gulls.
  - The range is expanding northward/
- 75,000 ducks winter in the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

- This year there were twice as many dabblers in the area SFBBO monitors, but this is likely due to local movement, not a change in overall population or number in the Bay.
- To monitor these changes accurately, it is important to gain access to currently inaccessible sites and supporting surveys of the entire area.

### **SFBBO Monitoring and Research**

- The populations of the gull and tern colonies are counted once each year.
- SFBBO has a cooperative agreement with the refuge to monitor the Snowy Plover population in the South Bay.
- SFBBO and USGS are working with Newby Island Landfill as they start a deterrent program to discourage the gulls from using the landfill. The researchers are also working on a food study and trying to determine what contribution local landfills have on sustaining the gull population.
- For the first time in 15 years, this winter a Bay-wide winter shorebird survey was completed by PRBO, SFBBO, USGS and others. All of the shorebirds were counted in a 3-day period.

### *US Geological Survey, Nicole Athearn*

#### **Management Considerations:**

- Potential effects of habitat conversion include:
  - Reduction in tidal mudflats
  - Reduction of open water waterfowl habitat
  - Reduction of shallow, saline areas for shorebirds
- Key foraging guilds that were sampled as being potentially affected by pond conversion were small shorebirds, medium shorebirds, diving ducks, phalaropes and eared grebes.
- Management should be at both the pond and complex levels.
  - Pond habitat value differs for each avian foraging guild
  - Water depth determines prey availability.
  - Avian foraging guilds generally used a predictable subset of ponds and did not use ponds equally.
  - Bird use within ponds differed spatially according to water depth and other factors.
  - Salt ponds support most shorebirds seen feeding on adjacent mud flats on ebb tide.
    - Maintaining ponds is not going to work if mudflat foraging habitat is lost.
- The South Bay is in a period of sediment deposition. The groups of birds that may be most affected by this include scaup, sandpipers, phalaropes, medium shorebirds, and Eared Grebes.
- Some individual managed ponds can likely support more birds than those that currently use them, but management should target specific foraging guilds.

#### **Other Findings**

- Alviso is the most heavily used complex by diving ducks.
- Newark and Mowry pond systems supported Eared Grebes and some shorebirds, but few diving ducks
- Small shorebirds peak in April. Ravenswood has the highest density, followed by Eden Landing.
- Medium shorebirds have a similar distribution as small shorebirds, with similar water depth needs, although they can occur in ponds with higher salinity levels.

- Eared Grebes select deep and salty ponds. Their numbers have been consistent at Eden Landing and Alviso until last year when they dropped off. The Initial Stewardship Plan decreased pond salinity, although a couple ponds were retained for Eared Grebes.
- Phalaropes are more difficult to determine patterns and needs

### **USGS Monitoring and Research Timing and Finding Summary**

- Monthly counts have occurred in project ponds since 2002 (USGS)
- Ponds still in salt production were added in 2005 (SFBBO)
- Shorebird mud flat surveys indicate >1M birds

#### *Actions:*

- *The JV will call contacts at Cargill to help obtain access permission to areas currently not surveyed due to access issues.*
- *The JV will ask PRBO to present findings of a Bay wide shorebird survey at an upcoming SFBJV RST Committee meeting.*

### **3. Tiered project list and funding information review**

Participants reviewed priority project lists for accuracy of information. Projects in Tier 1 “Ready to Go”, Tier 2, and Other Active projects were updated with JV partner input.

### **4. Round Robin Project updates and Announcements**

Brad Olson - Berkeley Meadow Phase 3 –planning for construction. The State Coastal Conservancy will be deciding in May on a grant of approximately \$1.2 Million for 35.6 acres of seasonal wetland, coastal scrub, and prairie restoration and enhancement adjacent to the Bay.

Working with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the East Bay Regional Park District will introduce California seablight tomorrow at the Emeryville Crescent.

This summer, the District will initiate a burrowing owl project on Albany plateau that will attempt to attract nesting birds. The biggest challenge will be management of off leash dogs.

Due to problems with Caspian Tern predation on the salmon and steelhead fisheries in Oregon’s Columbia River, the US Fish and Wildlife service is considering relocating the terns. East Bay sites under consideration include Brooks Island Regional Shoreline in Richmond, Hayward Regional Shoreline and sandy areas in the Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge near Fremont. There is currently no resolution on the issue.

Christina Sloop – A document in two volumes entitled “Enhancing and Caring for the Laguna” is available online at [http://www.lagunadesantarosa.org/management\\_plan.html](http://www.lagunadesantarosa.org/management_plan.html). Volume I is a restoration and management plan for the Laguna de Santa Rosa, the 7<sup>th</sup> largest seasonal wetland complex in North America. Volume II is a resource set to support the plan that includes maps, and tables on invasive species, biological diversity, water resources, etc. A hardcopy is available for loan from the Joint Venture. Hardcopies are also available for purchase from the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation.

The Laguna Foundation is hosting a “State of the Laguna” conference the last week of March. JV partners are invited. [Note: The JV will post the conference information on the JV web site.]

Beth Huning – NAWCA update – No proposals will be submitted in the March cycle. A joint application for Tolay Lake and Sears Point restorations will be submitted in the July round.

The SFBJV just completed a brochure that compiles key messages and priority project information for partners to carry with them if they plan to visit Capitol Hill in the coming weeks. The idea is to ensure that consistent messages are delivered regarding the shared priorities of the partnership in addition to the requests from individual organizations. Marc Holmes and Catherine Hickey both requested copies.

Integrated Regional Water Management Plan (IRWMP) – After much investigation by the JV into IRWMP funding for JV –supported projects, the bottom line is that it is that State IRWMP funding, at least from Prop. 50, will not be a major funding source for restoration projects in the Bay. The Bay Area IRWMP was not approved in the last round. Another application will be submitted, but not for another year after the RFP is released by DWR in September. Partners can continue to stay informed and involved in the process to help create a better plan and proposal.

A study is underway on Clapper Rails in conjunction with the Invasive Spartina Project. A graduate student is looking at where they are how they move, particularly in response to Spartina removal. One site of interest is Colma Marsh in South San Francisco.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service is studying and considering de-listing Yuma Clapper Rails along the Colorado River. JV partners commented that it is important monitoring data be considered prior to and after de-listing.

The Central Valley Joint Venture just completed their Implementation Plan Revision. Energetic models were used for all major bird groups. Catherine Hickey wrote a chapter for the plan.

Kate Symonds - The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program is in their process of decision making for cost share funds. Decisions will be made in March

**5. The meeting was adjourned.**