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1. **PARKS: San Francisco targets Yosemite Slough as restoration beachhead** (08/16/2007)

Arthur O'Donnell, *Land Letter* editor

SAN FRANCISCO -- Working from a map, it seems easy enough to access Yosemite Slough from the Bayview-Hunters Point neighborhood. But most streets in this heavily industrialized section of San Francisco meet with a dead end of concrete and chain-link fencing topped with razor wire. And while a greenbelt of trees and bay grasses beckon just beyond these urban borders, a visitor needs an active imagination to envision how acres of illegally dumped garbage, construction debris and other refuse can be cleaned up and transformed into a welcoming state park and shoreline recreation area.

That is long-term goal of the California State Parks Foundation and its partners for the \$25 million restoration effort -- to provide new access to the bay, new economic and recreational opportunities for residents and, possibly, a new vision for this hard-pressed community.



Yosemite Slough is a tidal inlet that is part of the Candlestick Point State Recreation Area. Currently, the area's main feature is the Monster Park football stadium, but a \$25 million restoration program will turn the slough into a wetlands park and welcoming stopover for migrating birds. Photo by Arthur O'Donnell.

"We'll clean it and remediate the entire area. In some places dirty soil will be removed, the land will be leveled and lowered" to provide shore access, she said.

The State Parks Department will oversee the project with funding assistance from the foundation and other sources, including the California Coastal Conservancy, the Wildlife Conservation Board, and the CALFED consortium of state and federal water agencies.

The foundation already has raised about half of the funding needed for its overall five-year program, with a recent \$1.5 million grant from the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Foundation that will enable the start of the first phase of the project in January 2008. This first phase would last 18 months and include restoring and enhancing 11 acres

Yosemite Slough marks the outlet of one of San Francisco's four historic creeks, the once free-flowing Yosemite Creek that has largely been channeled underground, blocked off and turned into a conduit for sewer overflows during heavy rains. A 2003 study by the University of San Francisco showed the runoff streams and the slough to be to heavily contaminated with PCBs and other toxins, representing a serious health threat for Bayview residents who still depend on fishing in the bay.

Though a part of the Candlestick Point State Recreation Area, the slough and vicinity has been neglected for so long that most city residents do not even consider it public space -- at best, a place for overflow parking during football games and a desolate, possibly dangerous place to be most other times.

"We're taking 34 acres of water and land that's currently a junk heap of construction debris," said Elizabeth Goldstein, president of the foundation.

of tidal wetlands, creating a sandy beach for bird nesting, and installing a visitors center, public trails and interpretive signs at the slough.

The cleanup will also help reduce the amount of polluted runoff that flows into the bay at the slough.

Redeveloping the southeastern shores

When done, the Yosemite Slough restoration project could become the cornerstone of a series of adjacent bay restoration projects that will redefine the city's eastern shores. Other projects include the cleanup and development of the former Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, immediately north of Yosemite Slough ([Land Letter](#), Nov. 9, 2006), and the possible construction of a new football stadium either at the southern end of the slough park, or on the shipyard property -- as has been proposed by Mayor Gavin Newsom in his bid to keep the National Football League's San Francisco 49ers from moving to Santa Clara.

It could also provide another leg of the S.F. Bay Trail Project, which is forging a 400-mile network of walkways, bike routes, and shore access points along the entire perimeter of the bay. The project complements restoration at the Hunters Point shipyard being designed by Arc Ecology.

ARC Ecology's executive director Saul Bloom foresees in this depressed southeastern corner of the city an uninterrupted park system that rivals San Francisco's northern waterfront, including the Marina Green and Aquatic Park, where beaches, piers, forested areas, green space, lawns and playing fields are interspersed with art, tourism, retail, restaurants, small businesses, former warehouses converted into office space and nearby housing.

It could be years, perhaps even decades, before such a vision can become reality, particularly because of the heavy contamination of soils on what are known as Parcel E properties inside the shipyard and the continuing controversy about residential development currently being pursued on Parcel A by Lennar Corp. under a contract with the city. Most recently the Bayview community has been protesting the alleged health effects of asbestos-laced dust created by the construction. The neighborhood residents already suffer from elevated rates of asthma, cancers and other health woes, and many do not trust city government or the company to do anything about their problems.

While recognizing the difficulties that lie just next door, Goldstein is able to draw boundaries between the shipyard and the Yosemite Slough restoration. "We're lucky that the two properties abut each other," she said. "But we're also lucky our remediation issues are not as costly."

When complete, according to the Coastal Conservancy, the full restoration would increase the tidally-influenced area from nine acres currently to about 20 acres, with another 14 acres of shoreline park. It would create two bird-nesting islands -- one of which designed specifically to attract protected species and migrating flocks. In all, there will be nearly a mile of new trails with several vista points along the bay.

Another aspect of the restoration project, according to foundation program manager Cecille Caterson, is enlisting the community. One project is working with the local group Literacy for Environmental Justice to create Bay Youth for the Environment, an after-school program that pays local youth an hourly stipend above the minimum wage to help raise as many as 10,000 native plants and shrubs each year that will be replanted in the restored park. The nursery, located across the street from public housing, operates under a sign describing "Plants Gone Wild."

Besides learning horticultural techniques, participants in the program also help inform the community about the restoration by giving presentations to local organizations and volunteering at the Candlestick Point recreation area.



A glimpse of Yosemite Slough's potential as a wetlands park can be seen once the viewer gets past chain link fences and dumping grounds. Photo by Arthur O'Donnell.

[Click here](#) to view a map of the Yosemite Slough restoration project area.