

SAN JOAQUIN RIVER'S FATE IN COURT'S HANDS

FRIANT GROWERS REJECT FEDERAL MEDIATOR'S PROPOSAL TO SETTLE LAWSUIT

On April 16, a federal mediator's proposal to restore the San Joaquin River and settle outstanding litigation by environmentalists against the owners and users of Friant Dam was accepted by The Bay Institute (TBI) and other plaintiffs but rejected by the water districts that currently divert almost all of the river's water. As a result, the case went back to court on April 22.

"We're disappointed that the San Joaquin River has to wait for its final day in court," said TBI Executive Director Grant Davis. "Unfortunately,

Friant harms both the river and its own interests by not accepting a compromise solution that helps smooth the transition to restoring this vital resource for future generations."

The rejection by the federal Central Valley Project's Friant Dam water users, co-defendants in the case along with the Bureau of Reclamation, ended four years of negotiation with the environmental and fishing group plaintiffs. The case had been stayed six times since 1999, most recently to allow the Chief Mediator of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, David

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THE BAY INSTITUTE'S

SUMMER 2003



bayletter

HEADWATERS 2 OCEAN

GETTING TO NO DRAIN

ECO-FRIENDLY WAYS TO REDUCE AG DRAINAGE BY 90%

In February, TBI and other groups released a new report, *Drainage without a Drain*, which offers a solution to the westside San Joaquin Valley's chronic, toxic drain water problem without polluting San Francisco Bay or other aquatic environments.

The report lays out an environmentally benign alternative to the Bureau of Reclamation's recent court-ordered draft plan, which focuses on drainage disposal to the Bay, the central California coast, or a 5,000-acre evaporation pond complex that would be constructed in the Valley.


Instead, *Drainage without a Drain* shows how using the "Four R's" can reduce the drainage problem by 90 percent over a 5 to 10 year period:

- ✦ Reduce the volume of drainage problem water by using more efficient water management practices.
- ✦ Reuse drain water within the region where it is produced for salt-tolerant crop production, dust control, etc.
- ✦ Retire the most severely drainage-impaired lands from irrigated agricultural use.

- ✦ Reclaim solid salts through treatment, bird-safe solar ponds, and on-farm measures.

Conveyance of selenium-laden drain water through the partly completed San Luis Drain—begun by the federal government in the 1960s but halted by economic and water quality issues—to Kesterson Wildlife Refuge caused massive wildlife deaths and deformities in the 1980s. Growers subsequently sued the Interior Department to force completion of the Drain. A federal appeals court overturned the Fresno judge's ruling in favor of the growers, but reaffirmed the government's obligation to provide drainage service in some form.

The report, which was prepared by TBI, Environmental Defense, and Contra Costa County and its water agencies, is available in electronic form at www.bay.org.

What you can do: Send a letter recommending that the Bureau adopt the "Four R's" approach as the preferred alternative in its drainage plan to: Kirk Rodgers, Regional Director, Mid-Pacific Region, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, 2800 Cottage Way, Suite E 1907, Sacramento, CA 95825. 

Holmes On CALFED Board

State Senator John Burton has appointed TBI Bay Restoration Program Manager Marc Holmes to the 24-member California Bay-Delta Authority. Marc will be one of two at-large members on the board, established in January to oversee the CALFED Bay-Delta Program.

Swanson Honored By Fisheries Society

TBI Senior Scientist Dr. Christina Swanson has received the Distinguished Professional Achievement Award from the California-Nevada Chapter of the American Fisheries Society. She was honored at the Society's annual April meeting during which she was also elected as the chapter's president for the upcoming year.

Tales of the San Joaquin Premiers

Tales of the San Joaquin, a half-hour documentary by Emmy Award-winning environmental filmmaker Christopher Beaver exploring the history and future of the San Joaquin River, premieres this fall in Fresno, Oakland and San Rafael. Showings are scheduled to be held at Fresno's Tower Theater, 7:30 p.m., November 8; the Oakland Museum's James Moore Theater, 7 p.m., November 11; and the Rafael Film Center, San Rafael, 7:30 p.m., November 13. Tickets are \$15 in Fresno and \$8 in Oakland and San Rafael. TBI is a co-sponsor of the premiers.

Thank You Sidney

Sidney S. Pucek, a seven-year veteran of TBI's board, has submitted a letter of resignation "with great sadness," citing the distance between TBI's Novato office and

her new home in Reedsport, OR, as well as the press of the family fishing charter business as the reasons for her departure.

"I am extremely proud to be leaving TBI at a time when it is performing at the highest level and is regarded as the most respected and effective environmental leader," said Sidney in her letter.

Goodbye Max and Chris

TBI also says goodbye and good luck to Chris Choo, former watershed education coordinator, and former Staff Scientist Max Stevenson. Chris, who came to TBI in 1999, is now working for STRAW restoration partner Prunuske Chatham, Inc., near her home in Occidental. Max, whose original short-term research assistant position was extended for over a year, did invaluable work on TBI's Ecological Scorecard project.

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Lombardi, to work with four negotiators, including TBI Program Director Gary Bobker, on developing a compromise settlement proposal. The details of the mediator's proposal remain confidential.

Construction of Friant Dam in the 1940s completely destroyed California's southernmost chinook salmon run, and dewatered much of the river below the dam. Loss of the river's entire flow also aggravated environmental, water quality, irrigation and water project operational problems downstream in the Delta.

A lawsuit to compel flow releases from Friant to support fisheries and ecosystem functions was filed in 1988 by the Natural Resources Defense Council on behalf of TBI and the other groups. In 1997 the U.S. Northern District Court invalidated Friant's CVP contracts. After the decision was upheld on appeal, Friant and the plaintiffs began settlement negotiations, during which the first releases of water for environmental purposes since the dam's construction were made for three consecutive years, and comprehensive studies of restoration and water supply management conducted.



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WELCOME NEW TBI BOARD MEMBERS

The Bay Institute Board of Directors and staff wish to congratulate and welcome Karen Losee, Bruce Bochte and Nancy Carlson as the newest additions to the TBI board.

Photo Jim Tyler



Karen Losee

Karen Losee, of Novato, is a former marketing program and events manager for IntelliTools, a Petaluma-based educational development company. Currently self-employed, Karen once served as TBI's development manager and is a dedicated fly fisher.

Photo Pamela Vestill-Bochte



Bruce Bochte


Bruce Bochte, a Mill Valley resident, is co-founder of the Center for the Story of the Universe. A former baseball professional, he was named to the 1979 American League All-Star Team as a player for the Seattle Mariners. After retiring in 1982, he reversed course and joined the Oakland As for three years. A former board president of the Adopt-

A-Stream Foundation of Snohomish County, WA, he also has volunteer affiliations with The Marine Mammal Center of Sausalito and the California Academy of Sciences Steinhart Aquarium.



Nancy Carlson

Nancy Carlson, a San Francisco resident, has been a member of TBI's Development Committee since Fall, 2001. She has had a long association with the Junior League of San Francisco, including as a member of the Board of Directors, and served as former director of the League's

National Board of Directors. Nancy has served with Sojourn, the Episcopal Chaplaincy at San Francisco General Hospital, Planned Parenthood, and was director of development with the Laguna Beach Museum of Art, completing a successful \$3 million capital campaign. Nancy holds nursing degrees, including an M.A., from the University of Iowa. 

WELCOME NEW TBI STAFF

TBI also welcomes Brita Dempsey as our latest STRAW watershed education coordinator, Ann Dickinson as our new office manager, Rachel Smith, TBI's new special assistant, and Bridget McDermott, intern.



Brita Dempsey

Brita Dempsey, a former Teach For America Corps member in Mississippi, comes to TBI after a season as a fire effects monitor at Point Reyes National Seashore. She formerly studied invasive plants in New England wetlands and in Costa Rica, where she studied with the Organization For Tropical Studies and the University of Costa Rica. She has a B.A. in Biology with honors from Smith College.

Photo John Vallejo



Ann Dickinson

Ann Dickinson served as the Sara Shallenberger Brown Fellow in Environmental Literature at the University of Virginia and spent a year as a research assistant at the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute's field station on Barro Colorado Island, Panama. Ann holds a B.A. in English from Swarthmore College and an M.A. in English from the University of Virginia.

Photo Jonathan Beltran




Rachel Smith

Rachel Smith, a former river guide and outdoor education instructor, works part time at TBI, assisting with the donor database and in other administrative areas. She is a full time science teacher at San Anselmo Preschool. She has an M.S. in Experiential Education from Minnesota State University at Mankato and a B.A. in Psychology from the University of Virginia.



Bridget McDermott

Intern **Bridget McDermott**, a senior at Sonoma State University, is majoring in political science. Her goal is pursuing graduate studies with a focus on non-profit organizations. 

SUPREME COURT UPHOLDS WETLAND PROTECTIONS

By Hugh Barroll

More wetlands have been lost to agriculture than any other cause.

Sometimes the loss is temporary, as when waters drained from some wetlands are returned. Sometimes wetlands and agriculture coexist, as in the rice fields of the Sacramento Valley.

Other wetlands, such as vernal pools, depend upon undisturbed soils. Deep ripping and other forms of plowing destroy the soil profile holding the water source in place, destroying vernal pools.

Most of the vernal pools present when California became a state have been lost, most of those to agriculture. More recently, the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have used the Federal Clean Water Act to limit vernal pools loss to agriculture.

Generally, new farming operations affecting wetlands require a permit under section 404 of the Act to convert land to intensive agriculture. EPA and the Corps' regulation of agriculture under section 404 has been highly controversial. Last December, this controversy reached the U.S. Supreme Court in Borden Ranch Partnership v. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

In 1993 Angelo Tsakopoulos, a Sacramento area developer, bought the 8,400 acre Borden Ranch on the border of Sacramento and San Joaquin Counties in the upper reaches of the Mokelumne and Cosumnes River watersheds. He planned to convert thousands of acres of rangeland into vineyards and orchards. To do this, he needed to deep rip the tightly packed soils to let his crops take root. However, these soils held rainwater on the surface of land, supporting a complex web of vernal pools, other seasonal wetlands, and small streams. Deep ripping would not only eliminate the water source for these wetlands but also fill them with upland soils, effectively destroying them.



Wetlands in San Pablo Bay

Photo: George Snyder

For the next three years Mr. Tsakopoulos sparred with the federal EPA and the U.S. Army Corps over whether the Clean Water Act applied to his deep ripping. He developed portions of the Sacramento County side of Borden Ranch, and reluctantly accepted permits and administrative orders requiring mitigation for vernal pools and other wetlands that were lost.

In early 1997, Mr. Tsakopoulos undertook large scale development of the San Joaquin County side of the ranch, suing EPA and the U.S. Army Corps to establish his right to deep rip wetlands without a Clean Water Act permit. EPA counter-sued to address damage to wetlands on the San Joaquin side of the ranch.

Judge Garland Burrell later ruled that Tsakopoulos' deep ripping required Clean Water Act permits, assessing a \$500,000 civil penalty and mitigation for wetlands lost on the San Joaquin side of the ranch. In mid-2001, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed the ruling 2-1. The following spring, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to hear the case.

The Court agreed to consider whether earthmoving activities, such as deep ripping, were the kind of activities that Congress intended the agencies to regulate as point source discharges of dredged or fill material. The court was to also consider whether statutory exemptions freeing some agricultural activities from regulation would apply to deep ripping. Finally, the court agreed to consider the proper method for assessing penalties for cases involving the filling of wetlands.

The issues had the potential to dramatically reshape how EPA and the Corps place limits on the destruction of wetlands under section 404 of the Clean Water Act. Had the court determined Congress did not intend to regulate earthmoving activities under section 404, many observers believed the loophole would

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BAHIA WETLANDS PROJECT CELEBRATED

More than 200 people turned out recently to toast the purchase of 645 acres of Marin County wetlands previously scheduled for development. The event followed years of struggle over the Bahia wetlands before an environmental coalition persuaded developer Art Condiotti to sell the property for nearly \$16 million. The Bay Institute contributed the final \$107,000 needed to cement the deal.

Some 424 homes had been planned for the rare blue oak woodland with associated wetlands. The California Department of Fish and Game will own and manage 361 acres of restorable wetlands. The Marin Open Space District will oversee 207 acres and the Marin Audubon Society will retain 62 acres for restoration.

Barbara Salzman of Marin Audubon praised Condiotti for his graciousness in negotiating the sale. Other big contributors include the California Coastal


Conservancy, the Wildlife Conservation Board, the Marin Community Foundation, the Marin Open Space District, the North American Wetlands Conservation program, the CALFED program, CalTrans, and private individuals who donated more than \$500,000. 



Photo George Snyder


Bahia Wetlands area near Hamilton Field.

SUPREME COURT CONTINUED FROM PAGE 4

have effectively ended Clean Water Act protections for vernal pools and many other seasonal wetlands.

Following oral arguments last December, the Supreme Court issued a one-sentence order indicating the court was divided 4 to 4. Justice Kennedy, as an acquaintance of Mr. Tsakopoulos, did not participate. As a result, the Ninth Circuit's decision supporting regulation of these activities was affirmed.

Although this decision is only binding in the western states covered by the Ninth Circuit, other parties are expected to seek review of these matters before the Supreme Court.

Hugh Barroll is the lead EPA attorney on the Borden Ranch case. The views expressed in this article are his own, not those of U.S. EPA. 

CONSIDER DONATING TO TBI

The Bay Institute (TBI) is a non-profit 501 (c)(3) organization which welcomes contributions from individuals, foundations, agencies and corporations. Donations support our work in the protection and restoration of the Bay-Delta and its tributaries and are tax deductible. Donors receive TBI's *Bayletter*. Contributions of \$50 or more are recognized in TBI's annual report.

For more information contact Angela Moskow at 415-506-0150-ex 22 or Moskow@bay.org.

THE "BAY BOOK" IS (ALMOST) HERE! The Perfect Holiday Gift

Jointly sponsored by TBI and Audubon, *San Francisco Bay: Portrait of an Estuary* will be published in October of 2003 by the University of California Press. With text by award-winning environmental author John Hart and over 150 stunning photographs by travel photographer David Sanger, the book explores the past, present, and future of this unique estuarine system.

Order advance copies at www.bay.org and the proceeds will benefit TBI! Books will be shipped to you from the Press in early September.

This article first appeared in the San Jose Mercury News on Sunday, April 20, 2003

RECLAIMING SALT PONDS AIMS TO REVIVE BAY'S GLORY

RESTORING WETLANDS IS AMBITIOUS PROJECT

By Marc Holmes and Anitra Pawley

The San Francisco Bay of 200 years ago teemed with wildlife. Salmon were so numerous, it is told, that you “could walk across the Carquinez Straits on their backs.” Sea otters and whales frequented the bay, and flocks of wintering waterfowl were so large they were said to darken the sun at midday. A half million acres of tidal marshes in the bay and adjacent Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta created one of the richest habitats on Earth.

Today, just 45,000 acres remain, the result of urbanization that began around the time of the California Gold Rush. Settlers built dikes around marshes and drained them to “reclaim” farmland and expand cities, and to make salt.

For more than 20 years, efforts have been under way to turn back the clock and enable the wild bay to thrive again amid millions of people. With the purchase last month of 16,500 acres of salt ponds (an area roughly the size of Manhattan) by the California Department of Fish and Game and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, public attention is focused on the South Bay. In fact, the area is already familiar to many: It is seen from airliners flying overhead as a colorful salt pond complex — a patchwork quilt of reds, browns and greens, with each of the dozens of patches stitched together by miles of narrow earthen dikes.

The acquisition of these lands, from Cargill Salt, marks the beginning of the largest and most ambitious marsh restoration ever attempted in the bay, and could remake the entire shoreline from Redwood City to Hayward.

Purchase of the salt ponds was a giant step in what is, in essence, a grand experiment — the restoration of an entire ecosystem. This is not like buying old-growth redwoods to protect them from logging; this is active intervention to recreate a complex system that evolved over 10,000 years. And it is complicated by the fact that it must be done without harming the human communities ringing the bay.

LESSONS FROM EVERGLADES

Put simply, restoration workers will remove some of the dikes and restore the flow of bay water over desiccated wetlands. The goal is to rebuild precariously

low populations of native wildlife and plants. Bringing back the marshes would make the bay cleaner and provide important benefits to many wild creatures, including salmon, oysters and millions of migratory birds. It also would help temper summer heat and provide exceptional recreational opportunities, like sport-fishing and bird-watching, for residents and visitors alike.

The Cargill project is typical of the incremental approach being used to rejuvenate large ecosystems. Restoration of the Florida Everglades is proceeding similarly, by undertaking smaller projects within a larger landscape. Lessons from the Everglades, as well as from a restoration project under way in the North Bay, offer clues to the challenges scientists will face. The physical challenges are huge — with small actions capable of changing the environment in big ways. But financial challenges are likely to be just as daunting.

Money problems have dogged the project from the beginning. A purchase deal with Cargill was worked out even before dollars were in hand. Negotiators had pinned their hopes on the success of two California parks and water bond measures that, to their relief, passed last year. The bonds contributed \$72 million, while \$20 million from private foundations and \$8 million from the federal government completed the \$100 million deal. Had Californians not passed the measures, it is likely that the state would not have financed the purchase.

The project comes just as California and the federal government face record deficits. But even in good times, the agencies that are the new co-owners of the complex are routinely denied funds needed to manage their refuges.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service already manages 40,000 acres of lands around the bay with a budget of only \$2.5 million. This is relative wealth compared with the paltry \$480,000 that the California Department of Fish and Game receives to manage 112,000 acres in 15 counties. These budgets are inadequate to manage existing lands, let alone finance a new large program. The Cargill restoration is expected

SALT PONDS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

to cost about \$10 million a year initially, dropping to around \$2 million a year over time.

The total cost to remake the South Bay ecosystem depends on the obstacles scientists encounter, but estimates range from \$300 million to \$1 billion over several decades.

Money is needed to address ecological problems the ordinary citizen would never anticipate. For example, for years ships from around the globe have discharged ballast water into the bay, launching all manner of exotic plants and animals into the ecosystem. The bay now is home to numerous non-native species that do serious harm to native plants and animals. One notorious example is smooth cordgrass, a marsh plant from the eastern seaboard of the United States. It has become established in the bay, and many scientists worry that it could colonize the salt ponds if the levees are breached, displacing native cordgrass.

Another challenge stems from the fact that tide waters have not flowed over the salt pond complex in more than 100 years. Once levees are removed, the bay will rush in. Scientists worry that will erode sediment from existing South Bay mud flats, vastly reducing their acreage. These mud flats are wide tracts of the bay floor that are exposed at low tide; millions of shorebirds feed on them.

Lawmakers who might be tempted to withhold funding need look no further than to a 9,000-acre project near Vallejo for a cautionary tale of inaction. The property, also used by Cargill for salt, was bought by California in 1994. Only in the last few years has the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers assisted with money to plan the restoration, though no funding has been provided to implement the plan.

Problems surfaced from the outset. Dikes within the complex threatened to fail from lack of maintenance. Since circulation of bay water through the system stopped when salt-making ceased, pond water evaporated, degrading valuable feeding areas for shorebirds. Last year, two ponds dried out completely and became barren wastelands. In the summer, vandals breached the containment dike of a large salt pond, necessitating costly repairs.

Similar problems in the South Bay could lead to serious flooding of nearby neighborhoods, where excessive groundwater pumping in the past has even increased the flood risk by causing some areas to


sink below sea level. While the dikes that enclose the South Bay salt ponds were not built to provide flood protection, that has become one of their important functions.

Having learned a valuable lesson from the North Bay, the philanthropic partners in the South Bay acquisition (the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Fund; the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation; the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation; and the David and Lucile Packard Foundation) insisted that \$10 million be set aside to finance a five-year interim planning and maintenance program. Still, neither the state nor federal government has committed any funds to implement the restoration once planning is complete.

THE CLAPPER RAIL

That leaves the future of marsh wildlife, like the endangered California clapper rail, uncertain. Clapper rails look like small brown chickens with longish beaks. They communicate by clapping the upper and lower parts of their bills together, hence their name. These marsh birds inspired the expression "thin as a rail" because their bodies are almost comically narrow to ease passage through dense stands of tall cordgrass. Unique to California, they once ranged from Monterey Bay to Humboldt Bay, but survive now only in San Francisco Bay.

No one knows how many rails lived in the bay's marshes, but certainly there were tens of thousands. They were hunted, but that's not why fewer than 1,200 remain today. Clapper rails are on the brink of extinction because the wetland ecosystem that sustained them dried up.

Revitalization of San Francisco Bay's wetlands not only will help save these wild creatures but likely will create broad social benefits. Now that the stage is set to repair decades of ecological damage, government should dedicate itself to the cause and put California's Everglades back on the map. 

MARC HOLMES *manages the Bay Restoration Program* and **ANITRA PAWLEY** *is senior ecologist for the Bay Institute, a non-profit environmental organization in Novato. Holmes has long advocated for restoration of the salt ponds and was consulted during purchase negotiations. They wrote this article for Perspective.*

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“PAINT-OUT” AND ART EXHIBIT CELEBRATE TBI’S WORK

It takes imagination to stand atop the hill adjacent to TBI’s offices at the former Hamilton airfield, look out over 2,300 acres of farmland and abandoned runways, and envision the scene when one of the largest and most important tidal wetland projects on San Francisco Bay is completed.

Luckily, imagination was in ready supply as artists gathered to capture the landscape on canvas during an April weekend “Paint-Out.”

A collaboration between TBI and Indian Valley Artists, Inc. (IVA), the “Paint Out” was in preparation for a June art exhibit, “Of the Earth,” featuring paintings, photography, and sculpture about the environment and its preservation.

The artwork will be on display to the public 11:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. on Saturdays & Sundays through June at the IVA Gallery, 781 Hamilton Parkway,



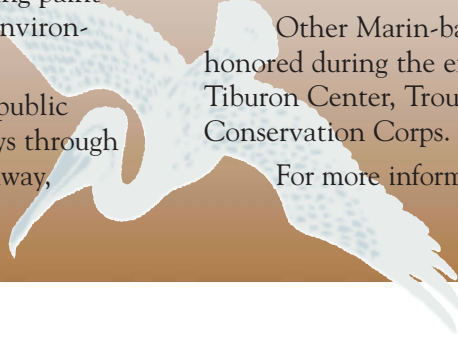
Photo: George Snyder

View of Hamilton Wetlands from Reservoir Hill.

Novato. The final weekend of the exhibit has been set aside to highlight the work of TBI.

Other Marin-based environmental groups to be honored during the exhibit include the Romberg-Tiburon Center, Trout Unlimited, and the Marin Conservation Corps.

For more information call IVA at (415) 506-0137.



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