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SENATOR MIGDEN@SEN.CA.GOV
March 5, 2008

Mr. Douglas Bosco, Chairman
California Coastal Conservancy
Attention: Joel Gerwein
1330 Broadway, 13th Floor
Oakland, CA 94612

California State Senate

SENATOR
CAROLE MIGDEN
THIRD SENATE DISTRICT

CHAIRWOMAN, COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC SAFETY
MAJORITY WHIP



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Dear Chairman Bosco:

I am writing in full support of the Tomales Bay Watershed Council's (TBWC) Third Valley Creek and Chicken Ranch Beach restoration project.

Chicken Ranch Beach, a popular Marin County beach, sits on Tomales Bay, a United States Ramsar site and state-designated Critical Coastal Area. Unfortunately, pathogens, sediments, and nutrients have threatened water quality in Tomales Bay and specifically at Chicken Ranch Beach. The Regional Water Quality Control Board has listed the waters of the bay as impaired.

This project will include both marsh and aquatic restoration elements that will improve the mosaic of refuge habitats used by resident and visiting birds, as well as by marine and aquatic organisms. Native vegetation will be restored and non-native species removed. Additionally, this site's habitats will interconnect with currently protected habitats along Tomales Bay and with scheduled restoration efforts such as the Giacomini Wetland Project.

Water quality monitoring during the last four years has indicted that samples collected in this area often exceed state standards for contact recreation at this popular community beach. This area borders public lands that are used daily, with as many as a few hundred visitors counted during a sunny weekend. The beach is used for swimming, wading, kayaking, picnicking, and recreation of all sorts and simultaneously is posted to caution against water contact due to water quality exceedances for bacteria levels in one section of the beach. Restoration of this site shall bring the bay waters into compliance with state and national water quality objectives.

In the 1950's, the project site was filled with dredging spoils when a trans-bay cable was installed. Since then it has been drained, filled and channelized. TBWC's plan to restore and expand wetlands and perhaps add a terraced flood plain should increase the wetlands' filtration function and reduce sediment delivery to Tomales Bay.

Finally, Chicken Ranch Beach is historically significant to the people of California. The public's right to access the coast in California was decided in the landmark Marks v. Whitney case.

The TBWC, a stakeholder-based group made up of federal, state, and county agencies, as well as representatives of environmental, maricultural, and agricultural non-governmental agencies and local residents, is well-placed to direct this restoration project as it brings the perspectives and expertise of these groups to the project.

As the Senator representing this area, I strongly feel this is an important project and add my name to the growing list supporting the Chicken Ranch Beach project. That support is broad-based and includes the State Lands Commission; the Marin County Department of Parks and Open Space, which own and maintain parts of the wetlands; adjacent private landowners; as well as environmental and local community groups. Thanks for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Carole Migden
Senator, District 3

CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE

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Jared Huffman
ASSEMBLYMEMBER, 6TH DISTRICT

CHAIR, Environmental Safety
& Toxic Materials Committee

COMMITTEES
Appropriations
Utilities and Commerce
Water Parks and Wildlife

April 8, 2008

Mr. Douglas Bosco, Chair
California Coastal Conservancy
Attention: Joel Gerwein
1330 Broadway, 13th floor
Oakland, CA 94612

Dear California Coastal Commission Board:

I am writing to express my support for the Tomales Bay Watershed Council's restoration project at Chicken Ranch Beach.

Tomales Bay is a remarkable estuary-- relatively intact as a natural ecosystem--supporting a significant biodiversity of species, and a spectrum of human activities from a vibrant mariculture industry to a host of water-related recreational pursuits. The shoreline and surrounding watershed is a mosaic of stunning beaches and open space mixing with small villages and agricultural lands. Unfortunately, the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) lists the waters of Tomales Bay as impaired on its 303(d) list, and the bay is under a subtle yet constant threat of increasing water quality impairment from pathogens, sediments, and nutrients.

The proposed restoration of Chicken Ranch Beach and the adjacent Third Valley Creek could turn back the clock on decades of degradation to a dynamic tidal wetland and riparian system. Originally filled with dredging spoils from a trans-bay cable trench in the 1950s, the project site has since been filled, drained, and channeled to the detriment of water quality and habitat values. To the degree that the restoration project can restore and expand the wetlands and perhaps a terraced floodplain, the project should increase the beneficial filtration function of the wetlands and reduce the accelerated delivery of sediments to the bay.

The Tomales Bay Watershed Council is the natural choice to direct the restoration effort. As a stakeholder-based forum, the Council brings many jurisdictional agencies, focused non-governmental organizations and a broad range of community voices to the project. The Council's reach and engagement within the watershed allow for small-scale integrated planning and design for the project. For example, the Council brought together two of its members with considerable experience in wetland restoration and management, the National Park Service (NPS) and Audubon Canyon Ranch (ACR), for advice and guidance from their hydrologists and wetlands ecologists. The Chicken Ranch Beach project has already benefited from this support, and the wetlands managed by the NPS and ACR will benefit from an expanded patchwork of functional tidal wetlands within the basin.

The proponents of the Chicken Ranch Beach project represent a broad range of private and public interests that have seen the common value in approaching this restoration. Key members of the group include the State Lands Commission and Marin County Department of Parks and Open Space which own and manage parts of the wetland as well as private property owners who have expressed a willingness to materially participate in the restoration. Local and regional environmental groups have provided support and initial planning studies, and a considerable groundswell of individual support from within the larger community has gathered to help with the initial conceptual and planning aspects, to start raising some seed-money for the effort, and to offer full-throated approval of this restoration.

This restoration has the potential to increase the natural habitat values and improve the water quality of Tomales Bay. Because it is sited on a highly accessible county beach, it also has the potential to provide excellent public outreach and education opportunities for the significance of tidal wetlands. Chicken Ranch Beach is an iconic piece of the California coastline, the site of the landmark legal decision of Marks vs. Whitney that acknowledges our right to access our shoreline. It is fitting that we recognize and begin to honor this ground by treating it with the care and value that it and much of our coastline deserves.

I am confident that you will give this project adequate consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jared Huffman".

JARED HUFFMAN
Assemblymember, 6th District