

California's Coastal Wetlands



SUNRISE ON TOMALES BAY, MARIN COUNTY

Wetlands were the cradle of life on the earth's surface. They are still among the planet's richest environments and offer many benefits to people, but they're not always appreciated. For more than a century, most of California's wetlands were filled and converted to other uses. Since the late 1960s, Californians have reversed that trend, through legal protections of wetlands that remained and restoration of those that had been lost or degraded.

The Coastal Conservancy has worked with public and private partners to protect and restore more than 50,000 acres of wetlands in coastal areas and around San Francisco Bay. The Conservancy has supported hundreds of wetlands projects and has been a leader of the State's largest restoration efforts.

Benefits of wetlands:

- Acre for acre, wetlands are one of the most productive wildlife habitats on earth.
- They are nurseries for fish, including important commercial species, and are necessary for the survival of many migratory and resident birds.
- They improve water quality by filtering pollutants.
- They recharge groundwater aquifers.
- They help protect coastal communities from flooding that results from storms and sea level rise.
- They capture and store a significant amount of carbon dioxide, a potent greenhouse gas.
- They provide opportunities for education and public recreation.

South Coast

Though the vast majority of wetlands along California's South Coast have been lost to human activity, key patches remain. Some are in excellent shape, while others are in desperate need of repair.

Since 1997 the **Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project (WRP)** has been working to re-establish a healthy mosaic of wetlands, rivers, and streams from San Diego to Santa Barbara counties. The WRP—chaired by the California Natural Resources Agency and staffed by the Coastal Conservancy—is made up of 18 State and federal agencies working with scientists, local governments, conservation groups, businesses, and educators. The WRP has completed more than 200 projects and has nearly 100 projects underway.

The Conservancy's work on South Coast wetlands dates back to 1978. Notable projects include:

- The **South San Diego Bay Wetlands**, where 257 acres of recently restored tidal wetlands are visited annually by tens of thousands of migratory birds on the Pacific Flyway and are nurseries for a wide variety of commercially important fish.
- The **Huntington Beach Wetlands**, where 290 acres of shoreline salt marsh, seasonal wetlands, and coastal dunes provide shelter for wildlife and outdoor recreational opportunities for the urban neighborhoods next door.
- The **Ballona Wetlands** in Los Angeles, where the Conservancy is helping to develop science-based alternatives to restoring tidal flows on the historic wetlands and to create new opportunities for the public to visit the 600-acre ecological reserve.
- The **Ormond Beach Wetlands** near Oxnard, where the wetlands have room to grow inland as sea levels rise, ensuring the continued protection of neighboring farmland and communities.

Central Coast

The remaining wetlands along California's Central Coast are critical to the survival of migratory and resident birds, commercially important fish, and the California sea otter, among other animals. The wetlands also offer flood-protection opportunities for neighboring communities and farmland. Examples of Conservancy-supported projects include:

- The **Devereux Slough** wetlands near Goleta, where the purchase of a golf course at the core of 650 acres of natural lands provided long-sought opportunities for habitat restoration and outdoor recreation.
- Restoration to wetlands of 85 acres along **Chorro Creek** near **Morro Bay** to protect adjacent farmland and capture sediment that would otherwise flow to and settle in the bay, threatening its fishing and tourism industries and wildlife habitats.
- Decades of work in the lower **Carmel River and Lagoon** to restore habitat for steelhead trout while reducing the risk of flooding in neighboring residential areas.
- Purchase and protection of almost 3,300 acres of wetlands and adjacent farmland along **Moro Cojo, Elkhorn, and Watsonville sloughs** in northern Monterey and southern Santa Cruz counties. The Conservancy has also supported large-scale restoration of the wetlands and construction of trails and visitor facilities.



CRISSY FIELD, SAN FRANCISCO



WETLANDS RESEARCHERS - RANCHO MARK WEST, SONOMA COUNTY



PIPELINE FOR FILL - HAMILTON WETLANDS, MARIN COUNTY



WILLETS & PICKLEWEED, SOUTH SAN DIEGO BAY

Mason Cummings

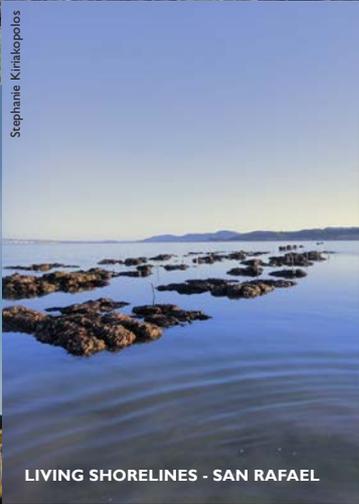
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



CARMEL RIVER WETLANDS, MONTEREY COUNTY



STUDENT VOLUNTEERS - BALLONA WETLANDS, LOS ANGELES



LIVING SHORELINES - SAN RAFAEL



DOMINGUEZ BASIN, LONG BEACH



SOUTH SAN FRANCISCO BAY SALT PONDS

San Francisco Bay Area

San Francisco Bay now contains about 42,000 acres of tidal wetlands—less than 15% of the wetlands that existed around the Bay in the mid-1800s. The unremitting loss and degradation of the Bay’s wetlands continued from the gold rush until the late 1960s, when public recognition of their value—and of the Bay itself—gave birth to legal protections and an outburst of conservation.

The Conservancy has long been a leader in some of the largest and most innovative wetlands restoration and protection efforts in the Bay Area. Conservancy-supported restoration projects include:

- The 15,000-acre **South Bay Salt Ponds**, the West Coast’s largest wetlands restoration. Former salt ponds are being converted into wildlife habitat that offers recreational opportunities along with protection against sea level rise for neighboring communities.
- The **Napa-Sonoma Marsh**, where nearly 10,000 acres of former salt ponds have been restored to managed ponds and tidal lands for waterfowl, shorebirds, and other wildlife.
- The 320-acre **Sonoma Baylands** project on San Pablo Bay, which demonstrated how dredged materials—formerly considered waste—could be used to restore bayside lands to functioning tidal wetlands.
- The **Hamilton Field Wetlands**, where 650 acres of a decommissioned U.S. Army airfield in Novato were restored and opened to tidal flows in 2014 following 18 years of effort. The adjacent 1,600-acre **Bel Marin Keys** site is now slated for similar restoration.
- Several wetlands in the urban core, including **Crissy Field** and **Yosemite Slough** in San Francisco, **Breuner Marsh** in Richmond, **Lake Merritt** in Oakland, and **Berkeley Meadows**. These small wetlands are a boon to wildlife and much appreciated by people.
- The **San Francisco Bay Living Shorelines** project, which is studying how oyster and eelgrass beds can be established to reinforce shorelines for protection against rising seas and severe storms.

North Coast

The Conservancy has supported several dozen projects to restore wetlands and neighboring habitats in bays, estuaries, lagoons, rivers, and creeks from the Golden Gate to the Oregon border. Examples include:

- The City of Arcata’s development of the world-renowned **Arcata Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary**, where wastewater treatment has been integrated with wetlands restoration and public trails that attract 150,000 visitors annually.
- Preparation of a **sea level rise adaptation plan for the Humboldt Bay Region** to help communities develop and employ strategies to protect environmental and economic resources in the face of a changing climate. The Conservancy is also helping the City of Arcata design a 22-acre “living shorelines” area on **Arcata Bay** to serve as a buffer against rising seas.
- Improvements to many **North Coast rivers and streams** to restore fish and wildlife habitats while providing flood protection for nearby farmland and communities. Salmon and trout have further benefitted from a comprehensive program to remove **barriers to fish migration**, opening many miles of historic spawning and rearing habitats.



SNOWY EGRET - HUENEME LAGOON, VENTURA COUNTY

The Coastal Conservancy is a State agency, established in 1976, that protects and improves natural lands and waterways, helps people get to and enjoy coastal areas, and sustains local economies along California's coast. The Conservancy works along the entire length of the coast, within the watersheds of rivers and streams that extend inland from the coast, and throughout the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. The Conservancy is non-regulatory and achieves its goals by joining forces with local communities, nonprofit organizations, other government agencies, businesses, and private landowners.

CONSERVANCY PROJECTS:

- Protect, restore, and improve natural areas and wildlife habitat
- Help people get to and enjoy the outdoors by building hiking and biking trails, acquiring and improving parks and beaches, and creating campgrounds and hostels
- Keep our waterways clean and healthy for people and wildlife
- Help communities revitalize their waterfronts
- Support floodwater management and integrate flood-control projects into the life of a community
- Conserve commercial fisheries, working farmland, and forests.

CONTACTS:

Sam Schuchat, Executive Officer
(510) 286-0523 sam.schuchat@scc.ca.gov

Deborah Ruddock, Legislative Liaison
(510) 286-4168 deborah.ruddock@scc.ca.gov

Dick Wayman, Communications Director
(510) 286-4182 dick.wayman@scc.ca.gov



1330 Broadway, 13th Floor
Oakland, California 94612-2530
(510) 286-1015

Visit our website: <http://scc.ca.gov>