

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
March 25, 2004

**SOUTH BAY SALT POND RESTORATION PLANNING**

File No. 02-070  
Project Manager: Amy Hutzal

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Authorization to disburse up to \$200,000 of previously authorized Conservancy funds to the San Francisco Estuary Institute for data and web site management associated with the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Planning effort.

**LOCATION:** San Francisco Bay, south of the San Mateo Bridge, in Alameda, Santa Clara, and San Mateo Counties (Exhibit 1)

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy

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**EXHIBITS**

Exhibit 1: Project Map

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31000 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of a portion of Conservancy funds authorized on March 25, 2004, for the South Bay Salt Pond Planning effort, as follows:

An amount not to exceed two hundred thousand dollars (\$200,000) to San Francisco Estuary Institute to manage a database and web site related to wetlands restoration work in the South San Francisco Bay. Prior to the disbursement of Conservancy funds, San Francisco Estuary Institute shall submit for the review and written approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy a final work program, including a budget and schedule, and the names and qualifications of any contractors or subcontractors that San Francisco Estuary Institute intends to employ.”

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. A grant to the San Francisco Estuary Institute to carry out portions of the South Bay Salt Pond Planning effort, authorized by the Conservancy on March 25, 2004, is consistent with the resolution and findings adopted by the Conservancy on that date, and with the authority of the Conservancy to award grants and support public/private partnerships in the San Francisco Bay Area to address resource and recreational goals.

2. The San Francisco Estuary Institute is a nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.”
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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

On March 25, 2004, the Conservancy authorized the disbursement of up to \$3 million of Conservancy funds, which will be reimbursed by the Wildlife Conservation Board, for the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Planning. These and other funds authorized by the Conservancy will be used primarily to obtain technical services needed to carry out the planning effort. The currently proposed action is for the Conservancy to award a grant to San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI) to continue its participation in the project. This authorization would enable the Conservancy and its project partners to use these previously authorized funds for the data management work described below, which builds upon a previous grant to SFEI in February of 2003.

This grant would enable SFEI to manage data that is compiled or collected as part of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, as well as manage the project web site, the primary venue for data sharing. The data management tasks to be conducted by SFEI will consist of the following: 1) management of a data warehouse and access system to store and share tabular data; 2) management of a central Geographic Information System (GIS) data server to store and share map-based data; 3) continued management of the existing web site, [www.southbayrestoration.org](http://www.southbayrestoration.org), and existing bibliographic database; and 4) inclusion and management of access tools for GIS and tabular data on the project web site. This data management work will build upon SFEI’s commitment to collecting and sharing wetlands and water quality data relevant to scientists and resource managers in the San Francisco Estuary.

Under a previous grant, SFEI placed a bibliographic database on its server, created search interfaces, added electronically available copies of reports to the database, scanned and added to the database reports that are only available in paper form, and made the database web accessible and searchable. SFEI and other stakeholders will continue to add studies to this database as they become available, so that the database is a continually evolving resource, useful to the project managers of the South Bay Salt Pond project as well as to other restoration projects throughout the San Francisco Bay Area.

In addition to the bibliographic database, there is a need to manage actual tabular and map-based data that is collected as part of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project. SFEI will be the repository for data, ensuring that data is protected from loss over time and working to provide access to data for stakeholders via the project web site. SFEI will ensure that common standards are used for creation, storage, and display of GIS and tabular data and will provide a single location to search for data. The data management effort will benefit the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project by allowing stakeholders to work from a common foundation when discussing project alternatives, and will benefit other restoration work in the Bay Area, by providing ease of access to data.

SFEI will also continue to host and manage the South Bay Salt Ponds web site, keeping it updated with project information, meeting dates and minutes, and related reports. SFEI will manage this web site in conjunction with SFEI’s web site, [www.sfei.org](http://www.sfei.org), which provides information on

wetlands and water quality monitoring, wetlands restoration, and historical information about San Francisco Bay.

SFEI is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to foster development of the scientific understanding needed to protect and enhance the San Francisco Estuary through research, monitoring and communication. SFEI's staff of wetlands scientists and information specialists is well suited to manage a bibliographic database and web site that will benefit the South Bay Salt Pond project as well as other wetlands restoration projects in the Bay.

**Site Description and Project History:** The entire South Bay salt pond complex is spread over an area of approximately 26,000 acres. Salt ponds surround nearly the entire Bay south of the San Mateo Bridge (see Exhibit 1), on lands that were formerly tidal marsh. An estimated 85 percent of the historic tidal marshes in the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary have been filled or significantly altered over the past two centuries for urban development, agriculture, and salt production. Although dramatically different from 150 years ago, the South Bay's wetland habitats, including the salt ponds, tidal marshes, sloughs, mudflats, and open bay, are used by large populations of waterfowl and shorebirds, by harbor seals, and by a number of threatened and endangered species, including the California clapper rail, California black rail, California brown pelican, California least tern, western snowy plover, salt marsh harvest mouse, and steelhead trout.

In 2003, the Wildlife Conservation Board (WCB) granted \$40 million to the Conservancy to fund Bay Area wetland habitat restoration projects, including related planning and technical design activities that implement the wetland restoration goals of the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture and the *San Francisco Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals Report* (1999). The South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project is specifically identified as one of these projects, and in March of 2004, the Conservancy authorized expenditure of \$3,000,000 of these funds for the purposes of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, to be reimbursed by WCB. Pursuant to provisions of the WCB grant, prior to entering into each agreement for the disbursement of funds, such as this grant to SFEI, the Conservancy and WCB will enter into a Memorandum of Understanding describing the relevant budget and work to be performed and providing for reimbursement of the Conservancy's expenditures.

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

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|---|------------------|
| Coastal Conservancy                           | <u>\$200,000</u> |
| <i>Grant from Wildlife Conservation Board</i> |                  |
| <b>Total Project Cost</b>                     | <b>\$200,000</b> |

The Conservancy's contribution to these projects is expected to come from the funds authorized by the Conservancy for the South Bay Salt Ponds Restoration Planning in March 2004. It is anticipated that the Conservancy's funding will come from funding the Wildlife Conservation Board has provided to the Conservancy from the "Water Security, Clean Drinking Water, Coastal and Beach Protection Fund of 2002" (Proposition 50), which can be used for coastal wetlands identified for acquisition, protection, and restoration in the *San Francisco Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals Report* within the nine-county San Francisco Bay area described in Public Resources Code Section 31162. The South Bay Salt Ponds are identified for acquisition, protection, and restoration in the *San Francisco Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals Report*, a local plan recognized in Proposition 50 as appropriate for selection of restoration projects in San Fran-

cisco Bay. Pursuant to § 31162(b), this project furthers the San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program's goal to protect, restore, and enhance natural habitats. The project is also consistent with the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board's goal to protect beneficial resources, as described in the Water Quality Control Plan for the San Francisco Bay Basin (1995).

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

The projects conducted under this authorization would be undertaken pursuant to Chapter 4.5 of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, Public Resources Code Sections 31160-31163, to address resource and recreation goals in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The South Bay salt ponds are within the nine-county Bay Area consistent with § 31162 of the Public Resources Code, which authorizes the Conservancy to undertake projects and award grants in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area that will help to achieve specified goals.

On March 25, 2004, the Conservancy authorized the acceptance and disbursement of significant funding to carry out the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Planning effort, consistent with the goals, purposes, and criteria of Chapter 4.5 of Division 21.

This grant would utilize a portion of the total funds authorized to further these efforts, and would specifically implement §§ 31163(a) and (c), directing the Conservancy to participate in and support interagency actions and public/private partnerships in the San Francisco Bay Area to implement long-term resources and outdoor recreational goals.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):**

Consistent with **Goal 10, Objective B**, the proposed project would support the development of restoration plans for approximately 15,000 acres of wetlands in the Bay.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Planning effort is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, as determined by the Conservancy on March 25, 2004.

**CONSISTENCY WITH SAN FRANCISCO BAY PLAN:**

The South Bay salt ponds are within the permit jurisdiction of the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC). The proposed project is considered project planning and exempt from permit requirements.

The South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Planning effort is consistent with the San Francisco Bay Plan, as determined by the Conservancy on March 25, 2004.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The proposed authorization does not have the potential to result in any physical changes to the environment and therefore is not a "project" subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), as provided in 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15378.