

## **Boxer: Water resources bill crucial to Bay Area and California**

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OAKLAND -- A bill aimed at ramping up water projects nationwide is vital to the economic health of the Bay Area and all of California, Sen. Barbara Boxer told maritime business and government leaders Friday.

The Water Resources Development Act, Senate Bill 601, reauthorizes the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to deal with water issues ranging from harbor restoration to flood prevention. It cleared the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works -- of which Boxer, D-Calif., is chairwoman -- in March with bipartisan support. And the full Senate is expected to vote on it next week.

Boxer told the Bay Planning Coalition's annual Decision Makers Conference on Friday that she hopes the Senate will pass it by a big enough margin that the House will feel compelled to act as well.

"This is a huge bill for all of California," she said, noting that 45 percent of imports to the United States enter through the Golden State's ports. "This country has many needs, and the needs are not being met."

She said she's particularly excited about a section of the bill that would make low-interest federal loans available for water infrastructure projects across the nation.

The coalition likes another section requiring that money in the Harbor Maintenance Trust Fund, for dredging and maintaining harbors and shipping channels, be spent in a timelier way -- the fund has built up a \$7 billion surplus while many projects are kept on the drawing board. Boxer's committee built into this section a formula to ensure California would get a fairer share after the state in 2011 generated 32 percent of the fund's receipts, but received only 8 percent of the funding.

Underscoring the importance of maritime industries to the region's economic vitality, Friday's conference was held at a restaurant and event center in Jack London Square, which is owned and managed by the Port of Oakland -- the nation's fifth-busiest container port, supporting about 50,000 Northern California jobs.

Boxer said the bill is part of a bigger effort to reinvest in the public infrastructure, even as Congress grapples -- so far, largely without success -- with the federal budget sequester's effects.

She apologized Friday for having voted for the sequester deal in the hopes it would lead to a long-term budget deal between Democrats and Republicans. At the time, it seemed so onerous that it couldn't possibly be allowed to take effect, she said.

"I never thought this would happen," she added.

Congress felt the need to pass a five-month fix for irksome air-traffic delays, yet kids are being kicked out of Head Start early education and elderly people are going without medicine, she said. "Where's the outrage? This is dumb, and it's not necessary."

Rep. Eric Swalwell -- addressing the conference during a luncheon later Friday -- blasted the sequester as well. Swalwell, D-Pleasanton, who serves on the House Committee on Homeland Security, noted that the U.S. Coast Guard has had to cut back its patrols of Bay Area waterways and the Bay Bridge.

"It's going to make our infrastructure more vulnerable," he said. "If we don't have national security, we don't have economic security."

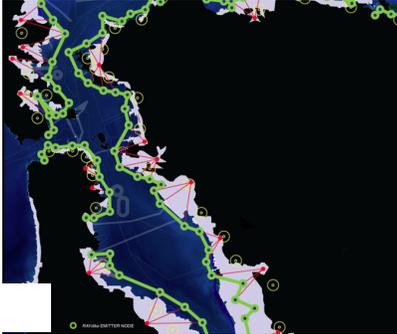
The Bay Planning Coalition is a nonprofit group representing public and private entities in the maritime industry and related businesses, including ports and local governments, landowners, recreational users, labor unions, builders and others.

[http://www.mercurynews.com/nation-world/ci\\_23168692/boxer-water-resources-bill-crucial-bay-area-and](http://www.mercurynews.com/nation-world/ci_23168692/boxer-water-resources-bill-crucial-bay-area-and)

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Science May 2013

## Saved by Goldilocks

by [Greg Dalton](#), on April 27, 2013

coastline

When people at Miami cocktail parties learned that John Englander was writing a book about sea level rise, many people took him aside and quietly asked him a question.

"If I sell my oceanfront property in a decade will I be O.K.?"

The answer is that nobody knows when oceanfront real estate will get hit by severe weather or falling prices. Englander's book, *High Tide on Main Street*, predicted that a superstorm would sometime in the future hit Atlantic City and the New York metropolitan region. One week after it was published, Hurricane Sandy destroyed the New

Jersey shore and sent a 13-foot storm surge into lower Manhattan.

Scientists had warned that rising carbon pollution could deliver such a megastorm, but regional officials and planners thought they had decades to prepare for it.

"Sandy is a wake-up call," Zack

Wasserman, chairman of the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC), said at a recent meeting of Climate One, the sustainability initiative of The Commonwealth Club.

The harsh reality is that the Earth's operating system is spinning out of control faster than many people realize. Many think sea level rise could affect their grandchildren and polar bears. Sandy, which was exacerbated by rising and warming oceans in addition to other factors still being studied, showed that seas that have risen seven inches in the last 100 years are delivering more powerful punches here and now.

That doesn't sound like much, but Englander notes that "the rate of rise acceleration has doubled in the last 30 years. That's the first indicator of a problem."

What does this mean for San Francisco and the Marina?

No one really knows, because planners and experts are just starting to get their head around all this. "The risk assessment that's necessary for the Bay Area is the first order of business," says Ezra Rapport, executive director of the Association of Bay Area Governments. "And we have not done a good one to date."

One reason is that doing a regional plan involves myriad local and regional agencies working together on a threat that is abstract and only tangentially connected to their core mission. The closest agency, BCDC, was created to stop the bay from shrinking. The challenge ahead is a bay that will certainly expand.

Another is that climate scientists measure trends over many decades, and their projections typically apply to swaths of land bigger than individual states, let alone counties or cities. That's a challenge for mayors and county supervisors.

Though the timeframe is uncertain, planners know certain things will need to happen. For example, the runways at Oakland and San Francisco airport will need to be elevated, because building seawalls around them will only shorten the airstrips for planes landing and taking off.

Who's going to pay for all that? Some officials are counting on Uncle Sam riding to the rescue. Rapport says "that is a risky proposition," because the federal government will eventually get tired of bailing out coastal cities from disasters.

One regional answer is the creation of a new agency responsible for securing funding and protecting vital infrastructure from the coming storms. The environmental group Save the Bay is planning a regional campaign for a parcel tax in the nine Bay Area counties to restore wetlands that can act as a buffer from surging seas. Melanie Nutter, director of San Francisco's Department of Environment, sees promise in an infrastructure bank that the federal or state government could create to attract private sector capital to infrastructure projects for a Bay Area with rising temperatures and seas.

While government agencies assess the risk and figure out how to pay for property protection, developers are steaming ahead with new buildings in SOMA and Mission Bay. Are the generators of the new hospital at UCSF Mission Bay in the basement where they could be flooded like New York University Langone Medical Center was last year? I recently asked a downtown developer what his company, which had a New York building flooded during Sandy, was doing about projected sea level rise; he groaned and said, "We don't have a good answer for that." The Urban Land Institute, an industry group, has set up a committee to study the issue.

One solution being studied for New York is a \$10 billion sea gate system that would protect the region from future storm surges. The Bay Area is contemplating something similar, a barrier near the Golden Gate Bridge known as Goldilocks.

"I happen to think that ultimately it might be the solution," Zack Wasserman said, adding that there is no engineering study and it is premature to say that is the way to go. One problem is how blocking water at the Gate would impact coastal communities outside the bay. Turning the Sunset District into a wetland would probably not be an acceptable consequence of protecting the Marina, downtown, and other low lying areas.

As Donald Rumsfeld famously said, there are a lot of known unknowns and unknown unknowns. The future of the Marina district and the rest of the City are full of both as we enter the era of climate disruption. One thing is certain: Dealing with the local impacts is going to be expensive. Living along the California coast has never been cheap, and we haven't seen anything yet.



**Greg Dalton** is the host of Climate One, a project of The Commonwealth Club of California. A podcast of all Climate One programs, including the "Bracing for Impact" shows featuring the speakers quoted in this article, are available free in the iTunes Store.

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## The latest on California politics and government

May 6, 2013

[Jerry Brown calls climate change reason for budget restraint](#)



Gov. **Jerry Brown**, who is preparing to submit a revised budget proposal for the coming fiscal year this month, has found a new argument for financial restraint: Climate change.

At a news conference today to kick off Wildfire Awareness Week, the Democratic governor said he will "do everything I can to deal with forest fires," but he said the bigger problem is how people adapt to climate change.

"It doesn't look like the people who are in charge are going to do what it takes to really slow down this climate change, so we're going to have to adapt, and adapting is going to be very, very expensive," Brown said. "That's another reason why we have to maintain some budget discipline."

Brown, who has urged lawmakers of his own party to resist spending despite the state's improving revenue outlook, said weather is "becoming more intense" as a result of climate change and will "cost a lot of money and a lot of lives."

Brown's remarks come amid a fire season that is off to an unusually fast start, with firefighters battling blazes throughout the state.

In that effort, officials said they will spend whatever is necessary.

Natural Resources Secretary **John Laird** said an emergency firefighting fund is in "reasonable shape," but that, "The message is clear: We will do whatever it takes to fight the fires and worry about that later, because public safety is first."

*PHOTO CREDIT: Gov. Jerry Brown leaves a news conference that was to start Wildfire Awareness Week at a hanger at the CAL Fire Aviation Management Unit at McClellan on Monday, May 6, 2013. Hector Amezcua / Sacramento Bee*

Read more here: <http://blogs.sacbee.com/capitolalertlatest/2013/05/jerry-brown-calls-climate-change-reason-for-budget-restraint.html#storylink=cpy>