

Shoreline restoration project breaks ground



KRISTOPHER SKINNER/STAFF

Jared Blumenfeld, regional administrator for the EPA, enjoys a walk near the shoreline Tuesday after a groundbreaking ceremony for the restoration of more than 150 acres of wetlands at Breuner Marsh in Richmond.

Officials, environmental advocates celebrate preservation of 150 acres of wetlands

By Robert Rogers

rrogers@bayareanewsgroup.com

RICHMOND — Against a backdrop of swaying grasses and shallow waters, Whitney Dotson stood at a mobile podium and reflected on a lifetime of working to preserve and restore long-neglected marshlands on Richmond's shore.

"This is really kind of overwhelming," said Dotson, a longtime local environmental advocate and East Bay Regional

Park District director. "This community has fought to protect this open space for years ... and we won."

Local and federal officials gathered along with more than 100 people Tuesday for a ceremony marking the beginning of the restoration of 150 acres of wetlands at Breuner Marsh on Richmond's shoreline. The project is expected to last two to three years.

The restoration of Breuner Marsh,

part of the Point Pinole Regional Shoreline, is in part funded by \$1.5 million from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's San Francisco Bay Water Quality Improvement Fund and matching funds from the park district. The project is designed to create a self-sustaining wetland complex that will filter polluted runoff; support native plant, bird and animal

See **MARSH**, Page 2

Marsh

Continued from Page 1

species; and protect against projected sea level rise in the next century.

Tuesday's event was a milestone in a decades-long effort to acquire and preserve the marsh, an effort driven by local activists such as Dotson and which has drawn nearly \$20 million from 10 grant agencies.

"This is a magnificent dedication to the future, to our kids," U.S. Rep. George Miller, D-Martinez, told the crowd.

Tuesday's event was part of an announcement, held on Earth Day, of nearly \$5 million in EPA grants to state and local agencies to restore water quality and wetlands throughout the San Francisco Bay watershed.

"A healthy San Francisco Bay — the largest estuary in the country — supports the livelihood of over 7 million bay residents, sustains hundreds of native wildlife species and aids in shielding the region from the effects of climate change," said Jared Blumenfeld, the EPA's regional administrator for the Pacific Southwest, in a news release.

The Breuner Marsh Restoration project will accomplish three main goals,



KRISTOPHER SKINNER/STAFF

Manzanita Charter School seventh-graders Odalys Ariza, right, and Liane Herzfeld, center, view the scenery during Tuesday's groundbreaking ceremony.

The park district acquired the property for \$6.8 million in 2011 through a three-year eminent domain process.

said California Coastal Conservancy Executive Officer Samuel Schuchat.

It preserves and enhances a delicate marshland that is publicly accessible near a dense urban community, provides a buffer zone against expected sea level rises over the next century and fills a 1.5-mile gap in the San Francisco Bay Trail along

the Richmond shoreline.

The park district acquired the property for \$6.8 million in 2011 through a three-year eminent domain process that included appeals to the state Supreme Court.

Dotson noted that the marshland was initially preserved as part of the nearby Parchester Village housing development,

which was built in the 1950s to provide quality, low-cost housing to the city's growing African-American community.

In the years since, community members and activists thwarted numerous attempts to develop the land for industrial uses, Dotson said.

"A whole community made this happen," Dotson said.

Contact Robert Rogers at 510-262-2726 or rrogers@bayareanewsgroup.com. Follow him at Twitter. com/SFBaynewsrogers.