

# SAN FRANCISCO BAY CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

50 California Street • Suite 2600 • San Francisco, California 94111 • (415) 352-3600 • Fax: (415) 352-3606 • www.bcdc.ca.gov

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**TO:** All Design Review Board Members

**FROM:** Ellen Miramontes, Bay Design Analyst [415/352-3643 ellenm@bcdc.ca.gov]  
Ellie Knecht, Coastal Program Analyst [415/352-3668 elliek@bcdc.ca.gov]

**SUBJECT: Breuner Marsh Restoration and Public Access Project (First Review)**  
(For Board consideration on April 8, 2013)

## Project Summary

**Applicant:** East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD)

**Project Representatives:** Brad Olsen, EBRPD; Patrick Miller, 2M Associates; Jeff Peters, Questa Engineering

**Project Status.** The Commission will likely hold a public hearing and vote on the project sometime this year. This will be the Design Review Board's first review of the proposed project.

**Project Site.** The project site is located at the terminus of Goodrick Avenue in the City of Richmond, Contra Costa County. Bordering the project site to the north is Point Pinole Regional Shoreline, which would be enlarged to include the 150-acre project site following project completion. The project site is bordered to the south by Rheem Creek and the Richmond Rod & Gun Club, to the southwest by a private, undeveloped parcel (the Carr Property), to the east by Union Pacific Railroad, and to the west by the San Pablo Bay. Approximately 120 acres of the project site is referred to as Breuner Marsh and 30 acres as Giant Marsh.

Historically the project site was a tidal marsh. During the mid-twentieth century it was graded and filled for agricultural and light industrial uses. Current topography ranges in elevation from zero to 12 feet (NAVD88) with two watercourses feeding into the site. Seasonal non-tidal wetlands, tidal wetlands, and tidal mudflats cover over 100 acres of the project site. Non-native annual grasslands dominate much of the upland areas. The area is degraded by artificial fill, debris, and non-native plant species. The Commission has Bay and shoreline band jurisdiction along the western edge of the site and extending inland along Rheem Creek and at the location of Giant Marsh. Portions of the project site are located within an area that is designated as a waterfront park priority-use area by the *San Francisco Bay Plan*.

**Proposed Project.** The EBRPD proposes to restore marsh and transitional habitat at Breuner Marsh and construct a 1½-mile-long segment of the Bay Trail, a ¼-mile-long spur trail, and other public access amenities. To establish self-sustaining tidal marsh, seasonal wetlands, and transitional habitat, EBRPD proposes to excavate new tidal channels, re-grade much of the southern portion of the project site, excavate areas to suitable tidal and seasonal wetland elevations, remove debris, and clear select vegetation. Existing upland and poor-to-low quality wetland habitats would be restored to high quality tidal marsh and seasonal wetlands, re-establishing natural ecological processes and providing habitat to benefit native species. Functions and services of wetlands would be improved by lengthening seasonal wetland hydroperiod, increasing frequency and extent of tidal flooding, providing refugia and breeding habitat for resident small mammals and birds, and increasing the site's overall resilience to sea level rise.



**Existing Public Access.** Currently the project area is not formally open to the public. However, other than signage, there are inadequate perimeter controls on the east boundary of the site along the Union Pacific Railroad tracks. Due to the lack of perimeter controls, the site is accessed and used informally by residents of Parchester Village (a residential community east of the project site) and other nearby areas. Along with the existing internal road system, a series of informal trails have developed. A locked gate precludes public vehicles from entering the project site from Goodrick Avenue.

**Proposed Public Access.** The project proposes to formally open the site to the public and provide opportunities for passive recreation and public education that are compatible with restored habitats and that require a minimum level of maintenance. EBRPD is proposing the following public access improvements as part of the project:

1. A gated entrance at the end of Goodrick Avenue with 24 parking spaces (two of which would be ADA van-accessible spaces), a 2-unit pre-fabricated vault toilet, bus parking, a turnaround area for bus and emergency vehicles, and use, management and interpretive signage.
2. A 16-foot-wide by 60-foot-long pedestrian and service bridge across Rheem Creek.
3. An approximately 1½-mile-long segment of the Bay Trail that would connect the Goodrick Avenue parking area with the existing Bay Trail within Point Pinole Regional Shoreline. The 12-foot-wide Bay Trail would include an approximately 160-foot-long concrete boardwalk over a newly constructed seasonal wetland and an approximately 1,350-foot-long concrete boardwalk over the existing Giant Marsh. Remaining sections of the Bay Trail would be paved with asphalt.
4. An approximately 1,230-foot-long stabilized decomposed granite spur trail leading from the Bay Trail to a vista point. The 8-foot-wide spur trail would include an approximately 180-foot-long concrete boardwalk over a newly constructed tidal channel.
5. An existing and unimproved 1,100-foot-long footpath extends along the peninsula from the spur trail. Access along the peninsula would remain open to the public until it becomes inundated with rising sea levels.
6. One picnic area with four tables, two of which would be ADA-compliant, located along the Bay Trail off the intersection with the spur trail. The picnic area would be located on a constructed mound such that it would overlook the restored marsh.
7. Multiple benches and interpretive points along the Bay Trail.

**Design Review Issues.** The Board's comments are sought on the proposed public access improvements listed above. Additionally, the Board should consider the following applicable policies and guidelines during this initial review:

1. **Adequate, Usable, and Attractive Public Access Spaces.** The *San Francisco Bay Plan* Public Access policies state: "A proposed fill project should increase public access to the Bay to the maximum extent feasible..." Further, the *Public Access Design Guidelines* state that public access spaces should be "designed and built to encourage diverse, Bay-related activities along the shoreline", to create a "sense of place", and be "designed for a wide range of users". The *Guidelines* further state that "[v]iew opportunities, shoreline configuration and access points are factors that determine a site's inherent public access opportunities."

The EBRPD proposes to construct a new Bay Trail connection, spur trail, public parking, public restroom, picnic tables, benches, and interpretive signage. The project would close a 1½-mile-long gap in the Bay Trail between the end of Goodrick Avenue and the existing Bay Trail in Point Pinole Regional Shoreline. In addition to the proposed parking area at the end of Goodrick Avenue, some visitors would enter the project area from the north via the existing Bay Trail. While bicycles would be permitted on the Bay Trail, the spur trail and existing footpath would be designated for pedestrian use only. The Bay Trail and spur trail would be

accessible to persons with disabilities up to the interpretive point at the end of the spur trail. The project is estimated to generate a maximum of 43 vehicle trips per hour, approximately 9,000 to 10,000 visits per year, and approximately 57 bicycle users per day (of which 40 are estimated to be commuters).

The Board's advice is sought on whether the proposed public access is sufficient to accommodate the expected level of use, designed to take advantage of existing and new site characteristics, is safe and secure, and includes the appropriate site amenities. Additionally, the Board should advise the Commission and the applicant on whether the proposed locations for the benches and picnic tables are appropriate to maximize opportunities for sitting, viewing, picnicking, and wildlife observation.

2. **Wildlife Compatibility.** The *San Francisco Bay Plan* policies on public access state that, "public access should be sited, designed and managed to prevent significant adverse effects on wildlife." In many locations around the Bay, the shoreline edge is vital for wildlife. Access to some wildlife areas allows visitors to discover, experience and appreciate the Bay's natural resources and can foster public support for Bay resource protection. However, in some cases, public access may have adverse effects on wildlife and may result in adverse long-term population and species effects.

Special status species that may be found in the project area include the California clapper rail, salt marsh harvest mouse, white-tailed kite, green sturgeon, steelhead, and Chinook salmon. Methods for avoiding adverse effects of public access on wildlife have been included as part of the project and are described below and on Figure 14.

- a. The parking area would be sited at the perimeter of the property away from the most sensitive habitats around Giant Marsh. This distance and the other use amenities provided close to the parking area would likely limit the number of users who would travel to the Giant Marsh area as use levels often decrease with distance from a parking area.
- b. A series of interpretive signs would be located at the Goodrick Avenue parking area kiosk and along the trail to increase understanding among visitors around sensitive resources present.
- c. Trails would be configured so that the most heavily used trail segments would be located toward the eastern side of the project area, as far from tidally influenced areas as possible.
- d. The parking area and Bay Trail would be paved and incorporate water quality swales to reduce erosion and impacts to adjacent habitats. The spur trail would be stabilized with decomposed granite.
- e. Perimeter fencing and gates would restrict access to the designated locations. Selected sections of 4-foot-high habitat fencing would protect restored areas. An approximately 4- to 6-inch gap at the base of the fence would allow for wildlife movement. In most locations, fencing would be set back from the trail at a lower elevation to provide users unobstructed views. Additionally, vegetation would be planted at strategic locations to separate the trail system from sensitive habitat where it occurs near the trail.
- f. Boardwalks and observation points would provide direct views of wetland areas but limit direct contact with wildlife and habitat. The top rail of the boardwalks would be of sufficient diameter to inhibit raptors from perching. Where possible, trails would be constructed in upland areas.

The Board should advise the Commission and the applicant on whether these strategies would adequately reduce or prevent adverse human and wildlife interactions.

3. **Sea Level Rise.** The *San Francisco Bay Plan* policies on public access state that, “public access should be sited, designed, managed and maintained to avoid significant adverse impacts from sea level rise and shoreline flooding” and that “public access provided as a condition of development should either be required to remain viable in the event of future sea level rise or flooding, or equivalent access consistent with the project should be provided nearby.” The *San Francisco Bay Plan* policies on climate change state “within areas that a risk assessment determines are vulnerable to future shoreline flooding that threatens public safety, all projects... should be designed to be resilient to a mid-century sea level rise projection.” Furthermore, “If it is likely the project will remain in place longer than mid-century, an adaptive management plan should be developed to address the long-term impacts that will arise...”

Wetland conditions would likely progress across the marsh as sea level rises through mid-century, but during the latter half of the century the location of the marsh may gradually shift inland with low-lying areas reverting to mudflats and high marsh reverting to low marsh. A rise in sea level of 16 inches by 2050 and 55 inches by 2100 was evaluated in the project design. All public access improvements would be constructed at a minimum elevation of 12 feet, three feet above the FEMA 100-year flood elevation of nine feet (NAVD88). With the exception of the existing unimproved footpath along the peninsula, public access features are designed above projected high tide elevations accommodating sea level rise past 2050, although storm surge and wave runup could result in occasional flooding of some public access amenities by 2050. The bridge, boardwalks, and asphalt pathways would be constructed using durable, non-erosive material in order to withstand occasional flooding. The existing unimproved footpath would likely be subject to flooding prior to 2050, at which time it would become closed to the public.

The Board’s advice is sought on whether the public access areas have been sited and designed to adequately avoid significant adverse impacts from sea level rise and shoreline flooding for the life of the project. The Board should consider the elevation, configuration, and materials used in the design of the proposed public access features.