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## Feinstein, Scarlett and Chrisman Survey Progress of South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project

*California Political Desk*

March 20, 2006



Dianne Feinstein

*Several Salt Ponds Restored to Tidal Action for the First Time in 60 Years.*

ALVISO, CA, MARCH 20, 2006 -- Today Senator Dianne Feinstein joined with Deputy Secretary of the

Interior Lynn Scarlett, California Resources Secretary Mike Chrisman and other officials and supporters to honor the three year anniversary of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, the largest wetland restoration project on the West Coast. The visit to the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge also marked the first time several of the former Cargill Salt Ponds have been restored to San Francisco Bay tidal action in more than 60 years.

Sen. Feinstein spearheaded an effort to purchase the former Cargill salt ponds in 2003. The dignitaries were joined by project partners in the restoration, including the Interior Department's US Fish and Wildlife Service, the California State Coastal Conservancy, the California Resources Agency, and the Santa Clara Valley Water District.

This month, through a series of carefully formulated and executed levee breaches, the Fish and Wildlife Service is re-introducing Bay water to a set of ponds known as the Island Ponds near Alviso. This effort heralds a major step forward in the ambitious 15,100 acre South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project whose goals are to restore habitat, provide flood protection and expand wildlife-

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dependent recreation and public access in the South Bay.

"Three years ago, I stood along the Bay to announce an historic public-private partnership — moving 16,500 acres from Cargill Salt to the California Department of Fish and Game and the US Fish and Wildlife Service," said Senator Feinstein. "I said at the time that I'd like to see the restoration completed in my lifetime. And today, we are seeing major progress toward that goal. So far more than 12,000 acres of wetlands have begun the restoration process, including the 479 acres of salt ponds opened to Bay water this month. This is a major milestone in the largest wetlands restoration effort in California history."

During the visit to the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Senator Feinstein and the federal and state officials were briefed on the Salt Pond Restoration Project and reviewed the results of one of the controlled levee breaches of the Island Ponds near Alviso.

They also met with project managers to review the progress of the long-term restoration planning process — a process which culminated in January with the release of three long-term restoration alternatives for the project. Those alternatives are currently undergoing environmental review.

"San Francisco Bay is a site of international significance, providing habitat for fish and wildlife including millions of birds and other species," said Lynn Scarlett, Deputy Secretary, Department of the Interior. "This largest tidal wetlands restoration project on the West Coast is critical to ensuring the vitality of this region and the Pacific Flyway. We are just beginning to reap the benefits of this unprecedented effort, which will ultimately restore more than 15,000 acres of wetland habitats," said Scarlett. "We appreciate Senator Feinstein's vision and are glad to be part of this terrific public-private partnership. In expanding cooperative conservation efforts, the department has found that partnerships like this one are the key to success."

The partnership includes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and U.S. Geological Survey of the Interior Department, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the California Department of Fish & Game, the Coastal Conservancy, the Santa Clara Valley Water District, the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture, and many other organizations.

"This project brings together the best of all worlds through a partnership of federal state and local agencies. We could not be more proud than to be part of the team," said California Secretary for Resources Mike Chrisman. "The regional and national benefits, including healthier fisheries, improved flood management, improved water resources, and enhanced wildlife-oriented recreation opportunities are central to Governor's Schwarzenegger's environmental effort to turn back the clock on decades of neglect. Ultimately, this partnership will benefit our generation, the next generation and create a lasting legacy now that will improve the quality of life for all future generations."

Since the initial restoration activities have begun and pond salinity has been reduced, Refuge staff have already observed a 100 percent increase in waterfowl and a 130 percent increase in

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shorebirds' use of these ponds.

Also joining Senator Feinstein, Deputy Secretary Scarlett and California Resource Secretary Mike Chrisman at today's event were Richard Santos, Board Member of the Santa Clara Valley Water District, David Lewis, Executive Director of Save San Francisco Bay Association, and Paul Brest, President of the Hewlett Foundation.

Long-term planning for the Salt Ponds Restoration Project began in 2003. The ponds were purchased from Cargill using state, federal and private foundation funds. In addition to planning for the long-term restoration, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the California Department of Fish and Game have been implementing the Initial Stewardship Plan (ISP) for the salt ponds. The goal of the ISP is to gradually reverse the salt making process at the project site, in preparation for launching the first phase of restoration in 2008.

The long-term restoration planning process is a broad based effort involving technical consultants, scientists with both local and international expertise, and the active participation of local stakeholders who meet regularly to provide input on the design of the project. The three goals of the long-term restoration plan are to restore habitat, improve flood protection and increase public access and wildlife-dependent recreation in the South Bay.

For more information about the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, please visit the project web site at [www.southbayrestoration.org](http://www.southbayrestoration.org).

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