

Levee breached to restore SF Bay tidal wetlands

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HAYWARD, Calif.—Waters released Tuesday from a levee on southern San Francisco Bay will help restore 630 acres of former wetlands that decades ago were turned into salt ponds.

The California Department of Fish and Game conducted the first of eight "controlled levee breaches," allowing bay waters filled with fish to flood areas dammed off in the 19th and 20th centuries by salt-making companies and flood-control projects.

The breaches are part of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, which has restored nearly 3,000 acres of wetlands. The project is the largest tidal wetland restoration effort on the West Coast.

Seven more breaches will follow in coming weeks in a project partly paid for with federal stimulus funds.

The bay's tidal flows and area creeks are expected to reintroduce wildlife, including crabs, seals and birds.

The new water will also bring sediments that will settle into the new marsh and allow saltgrass, pickleweed and other native tidal marsh plants to grow.

These plants provide habitat for the endangered California clapper rail and other animals.

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