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Environmentalists Celebrate Levee Destruction

The restored wetlands will provide habitat for birds, fish and critters like the endangered salt marsh harvest mouse

By [Joe Rosato Jr.](#) | Tuesday, Sep 13, 2011 | Updated 7:52 PM PDT



A tractor digs through a levee on the Hayward shoreline, sending a river of water onto dried out salt plains for the first time in a century.

With a crowd of onlookers cheering it on, a backhoe chewed through an East Bay levee Tuesday, sending a torrent of water flooding onto the salt-covered plain. Every scoop from its massive steel jaws seemed to transport the shoreline back through a century of development.

John Krause of California Dept. of Fish and Game watched the flowing water with a look of satisfaction. "We're looking at San Francisco Bay flooding into this pond for the first time in about 60 years," Krause said.

Moments before the tractor did its thing, these lands in the Eden Landing Ecological Reserve in Hayward resembled a barren moonscape. Salt plains stretched into the distance -- evidence of century-old salt mining operations that ran until 2004.

"Back into the late 1800s... there were small salt making operations here," said Krause who manages the reserve. "There were probably hundreds of salt making operations on the bay."

In 2003, the State of California bought 15,000 acres of East Bay salt marshes with the intention of restoring them back to wetlands. Tuesday's breach will return 630 acres to wetlands, and mark the first state lands to undergo such a transformation.

"We spent decades degrading the water quality and building on former bay lands and diking them off," said John Bourgeois of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project. "Now we're seeing a reversal of that trend."

Since the state's purchase of the land, Bourgeois' group has restored 2,000 acres of East Bay...

away at that.”

As the backhoe continued to punch away at the levee, the rising bay water began making its way across the salt plain, reclaiming land that had been off limits for more than 100 years. Nearby, a snowy egret stretched its wings, waiting for the opportunity to explore some new digs.

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