

# Chewing Through the Bay's Salty Past

**Gold isn't the only California treasure. Salt also played a key role in our history.**

By [JOE ROSATO JR.](#)

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Joe Rosato Jr.

The remains of the old Oliver salt plant stick up through the mud like crooked wooden fingers. All around, the planes of Eden Landing are thick with salt so they look as if they're buried beneath a fine layer of powdery snow. California Fish And Game biologist John Krause surveys the scene with an expert eye.

"Salt making in the bay was going on," he said. "Since the 1850s and onward."

Back in those times, salt makers walled off these tidal marsh lands near Fremont to create salt evaporation ponds. Schooners coasted into docks to load up with salt bound for a growing San Francisco.

Although most of the salt plants are now long gone, the alterations to the Bay's tide lands remain.



LOOK



LOOK

## Delta's Graveyard of Ships

But a new effort kicked off on Tuesday to return these lands to the way they were before industry and development came. Several years ago, California purchased 640 acres of the land with the intention of returning it to its original state.

"We're trying to restore the hydrology," said John Bourgeois of the California Coastal Conservancy, which is shepherding the project. "We're trying to restore those tides back into the old channels and let nature take its course from there."

As Bourgeois spoke, a massive back loader chewed through one of the old levees, scooping up mounds of dirt that had once stood between the Bay and the salt pools. The prep work will continue over the next year until the time comes to knock the levees down.

"And so today we can see the heavy equipment moving around," said Bourgeois. "We're lowering levees and building new levees in other places with the hopes of next summer, breaching these back to restore the tides."


The long-term plans include a trail through the area, including the first public access since these areas were walled off more than 150 years ago. The plan calls for the remains of the old salt plant to remain, so that visitors can see the area's past, even as the waters of its future come rushing in.

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The remains of the old Oliver salt plant occupy what were once tidal marshes along the Bay near Fremont. The salt plant opened around 1850, and closed in the 1920s.





## Images: Chewing Through The Bay's Salty Past



The tidal planes of Eden Landing are covered in salt from their days as a salt plant. Remains of the old plant poke through the mud and salt.





## Images: Chewing Through The Bay's Salty Past



Salt crystals in the tidal lands of Eden Landing. Back when the salt plant opened in the 1850s, schooners carried it back to a growing San Francisco.



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Partially blue skies open up to the salt flats of Eden Landing, near Fremont.



PLAY



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Remains of the old salt plant at Eden Landing. The remnants of the old business will remain, even as the area's tidal marshes are restored to its original condition. A new public trail will pass by the area.



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The water runs red in the areas where the old salt plant one stood. The red water is evidence of very high salianation.





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A back loader chews through the old levees to allow the bay waters to return the area into a tidal marsh.



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A tractor dumps levee dirt to be hauled away. The dirt will help construct new levees in the area.





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Two sides of the levee in Eden Landing.



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Cracked red dirt shows evidence of high salination in Eden Landing.





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A river cuts through the tidal lands of Eden Landing. In about a year, workers will knock down the levees allowing the waters to cover the old salt flats.



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Next summer, this area of flatland will be flooded with bay water to help restore it back into a tidal marshland.

