

Oakland Tribune

Expenses add up fast

Costs of

By Douglas Fischer
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Monday, December 01, 2003 - That it should take such large sums of money to reintroduce Nature to the Bay's tidal areas isn't always intuitive, particularly to taxpayers battling to purge Nature's wilder side from their gardens and lawns.

The task is complex. And a mistake could trigger catastrophe.

"There are an awful lot of very specialized experts involved," said Dick Wayman of the California Coastal Conservancy. "And the reasons they have to be involved is that you don't want to do it wrong."

Levees surrounding the South Bay ponds, for instance, serve as San Jose's first line of defense against flooding. Where to breach them is no small matter. Ecosystems have adapted to the ponds as they are now. Convert salt ponds to tidal flats and whole populations of diving ducks are homeless.

Plus, no one's sure where to find the mud needed to raise the ponds to sea level after decades of subsidence. Or how to stop them from making salt. Or what to do about invasive species. Or pollution.

"If you're moving dirt, it's extremely expensive," Wayman said. "A ton of dirt doesn't take up much space, but it costs a lot to move."