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## San Francisco Bay waters reach salt pond

By **Mike Taugher**  
Bay Area News Group

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A backhoe clawed through a dirt berm Wednesday, creating a channel that allowed San Francisco Bay water to reach former industrial salt ponds that had not tasted tidal waters for more than a century.

With the dirt berm removed, the Mount Eden Creek will spill into the former salt ponds on high tides, returning life to a once-dry area the size of three football fields and offering a hint of much broader restoration projects in the years ahead from Hayward to Alviso to Redwood City.

With the bay water reaching the salt ponds, mud flats will form. Pickleweed should start growing and eventually birds, fish and mammals, including endangered clapper rail birds and salt marsh harvest mice, are expected to move in.

Biologists said they expect to see results quickly.

"Just add water," said Eric Larson, the state Fish and Game department's deputy regional manager for the bay and delta.

It was the latest in a steady stream of marsh rehabilitation projects around the bay, where roughly 80 percent of tidal wetlands that existed at the time of the Gold Rush have disappeared.

On Wednesday, it was 350 acres of former salt ponds that are now destined to become wildlife-rich marshes. Earlier in the week, another levee was breached to flood another 30 acres in Marin County. In the coming days, 500 acres will be restored along the Napa River on the bay's northern shore.

"It's fabulous to see so much of this habitat coming back

to the bay after being closed off from the bay for so many decades," Larson said.

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The former salt ponds at the Eden Landing Ecological Reserve form a northern extension of the salt pond complex that rings the South Bay.

In addition to restoring wetlands, the East Bay Regional Park District on Wednesday dedicated a 2.5 mile extension of the Bay Trail, which is expected one day to continue around the South Bay. The extension is scheduled to open to the public later this month.

The Eden Landing property was purchased by the state in 1996 for \$12 million from Cargill.

The purchase signaled the epilogue in a long-running battle over a developer's plans to build a horse track on the property.

Frank Delfino and his late wife, Janice, were among those who led the fight against it.

"It lasted until the '70s, when they went belly up," Delfino said, referring to the developer.

The restoration project mirrors work that is beginning around the South Bay on another 15,000 acres of former industrial salt ponds that Cargill sold to the state and federal government in 2003. Over the next 30 years, biologists plan to breach levees all across those ponds, restoring wetlands for fish and wildlife to conditions not seen since the 1800s.

David Lewis, executive director of Save the Bay, said the fight waged to stop the racetrack might have been pivotal to the fate of the other salt ponds.

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"If this development happened here, that could have been an anchor for more development," Lewis said.

An estimated 190,000 acres of tidal marsh around the bay shrank to about 40,000 acres between the Gold Rush and the year 2000. That year, ecologists, wildlife agencies and environmentalists set a goal to increase that number to 100,000 acres to expand thriving ecosystems.

About 13,000 acres of marsh have been restored, with another 35,000 acres in planning or design stages, said Steve Ritchie, project manager for the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project.

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