

ISP Update: September 15, 2005

Levee Maintenance

One of the primary goals of the Initial Stewardship Plan is to cease commercial salt operations and prepare the project site for long-term restoration; another important aspect of the ISP is levee maintenance. When the state and federal governments purchased 15,100 acres of salt ponds from Cargill in 2003, they also inherited miles of levees. A handful of these levees will be breached and not maintained as part of the ISP, but most of the levees are being maintained by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Game. Although the levees were originally designed to isolate the salt ponds from the bay for Cargill's salt making operation, over the years they have provided de facto flood protection for many South Bay communities like Alviso that sit below sea level. As the nation sifts through the lessons of New Orleans and Hurricane Katrina, Project managers are working to ensure that there is enough funding to maintain levees during the course of the Initial Stewardship Plan and during the time it will take for the long term Restoration Plan to be implemented.

Recent ISP levee work is particularly instructive about the cost of levee maintenance in the project site. For example, the US Fish and Wildlife Service is currently repairing a three-mile stretch of levees damaged by a winter storm last year. The job, which involves the replacement of the rock protection on the outboard side of the levees, will cost the Service about \$500,000. The DFG has also been working to maintain levees and other infrastructure this year. Utilizing Cargill's expertise and equipment and funds provided by the Resources Legacy Fund, the DFG recently completed a six month, \$500,000 maintenance project. Just as the ISP has helped to clarify the technical challenges associated with managed ponds, current ISP maintenance activity is providing valuable data about the cost of maintaining levees and other infrastructure in the project site.

Dissolved Oxygen

Project Managers continue to use a variety of methods to address the low levels of dissolved oxygen (DO) in many of the ponds. A key culprit in the DO problem at the Alviso ponds may be the location of borrow ditches near the outflow of the ponds. These deepwater ditches tend to accumulate decaying algae and exacerbate the drop in the dissolved oxygen.