

Protection for Our Creek and Bay

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Approximately 90% of the marsh lands that once surrounded San Francisco Bay is gone. But with your help, protection for much of those that remain may be close at hand. There is a proposal by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to establish a refuge in Marin County. If all of the eligible land could be protected, the refuge would consist of 17,600 acres of baylands, along the western shore of San Francisco and San Pablo bays. There are a number of reasons that a national Marin Baylands Refuge would be good for the bay, fish and wildlife, property owners, neighbors, local governments and the people of Marin County.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is considering establishing a program to acquire lands or easements from willing sellers in an area that reaches from the Petaluma River to the southern portion of the City of Mill Valley. Once subject to tidal inundation, these baylands were diked off for agricultural use more than 100 years ago. The Service would acquire this land or interest in this land to conserve fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats and to provide wildlife-dependent public uses for education and recreation.

The lands being considered for inclusion in the refuge have important environmental values.

Enhancement and management of tidal marshes and diked baylands would greatly help the recovery prospects for several federally listed threatened and endangered species and would also improve habitat for migratory shorebirds. Most areas provide essential wintering habitat for migratory shorebirds and waterfowl including curlews, dunlins, sandpipers, mallard, teal, pintail, canvasback and scaup. The tidal salt marshes are essential to sustain the endangered salt marsh harvest mouse and California clapper rail.

The refuge would be good for bay water quality because it would increase the acreage of wetlands, other baylands and adjacent uplands that could be permanently protected and restored, reducing silt and pollution running into bay waters. Federal Land and Water Conservation Funds could be used to purchase the land or acquire easements on Marin baylands habitats.

For many property owners the proposed refuge would be a boon because it would give them another option for a buyer should they wish to sell their property or sell an agricultural easement. The Service only purchases lands from willing sellers and pays fair market values for lands it acquires. Lands within the refuge boundary already in public ownership would have the added benefit of technical assistance, if the managing agency requests it. Neighbors would also benefit because it would enhance their quality of life and their property values. The people of Marin County would benefit because it will preserve vistas to the bay, enhance opportunities for recreational uses and scientific study, and improve the bay's water quality, assuring a healthier bay.

Currently the Service is seeking input on the location of the refuge boundaries. Friends is particularly interested in ensuring that remaining wetlands in the tidal stretch of Corte Madera Creek are protected. Friends recommends that the following areas should be included within the study area and the refuge boundary: Creekside Park marsh, owned by the County of Marin; diked seasonal and tidal wetlands between Corte Madera Creek and Magnolia Avenue, and the Ecological Study Area on the opposite side of the creek, both of which are owned by the College of Marin; Piper Park tidal marsh owned by the City of Larkspur; The Corte Madera Ecological Reserve and several small privately owned areas of tidal marsh at the Greenbrae Boardwalk; and a parcel of land bordered on three side by the Ecological Reserve which has been proposed for low cost housing.



Corte Madera Creek at the railroad trestle, Larkspur

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