

BAY AREA LEAGUE DAY

STATE OF THE BAY SYMPOSIUM: RESTORATION, STEWARDSHIP, ACCESS

The League of Women Voters of the Bay Area was organized to address the region-wide issues and governance of the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. In addition to the counties that surround the Bay, the region was further defined by the air basin, the watershed, economic activity and, not the least, by the Bay itself. Primary regional concerns of the time were pollution and filling of the Bay, air pollution, water pollution and loss of open space. Six regional agencies have been formed to deal with these issues.

The symposium held on January 27, 2006 in Oakland focused on the State of the Bay with the intent to help Leagues understand the progress that has been made in restoring and maintaining the quality of the Bay.

Saving the Bay: Why the Bay Matters

The San Francisco Bay and Delta make one of the world's largest estuaries and the largest wetlands in California. They need fresh water to maintain their health. The problem is most of the fresh water coming into the Delta goes to cotton fields and swimming pools. According to Will Travis, the Executive Director of the [Bay Conservation and Development Commission](#) (BCDC), the Bay is not only an economic asset but it has spiritual value. It is the heart and soul of the Bay Area and gives us a sense of place. It is a "book of history and a hymnal." He said saving the Bay is a testimonial to the spirit of democracy. Travis closed by saying, "Without the Bay we would be just like anywhere else."

History of Bay Issues

According to Arthur Feinstein of Audubon California, there are several million birds that need the Bay habitat for rest and food on their migration. We are losing seasonal wetlands due to contamination. Human disturbance including dogs, cats, trails and boating also affect the migratory birds.

Sylvia McLaughlin, one of the three women who founded "[Save the Bay](#)," spoke about the history of the organization. It started in Berkeley in 1960 when the city planned to fill 200,000 acres of wetland. These three women persuaded the City Council that there was a better way to get rid of the fill. They realized they needed state legislation to protect the whole Bay, not just the Berkeley shoreline. State legislation was passed in 1965 and the Bay Conservation and Development Commission was formed in 1967. McLaughlin felt they were successful because they learned about issues, presented accurate information, attracted dedicated volunteers and gathered a wide variety of allies. She said, "When we started out all we thought we needed was a good law and the Bay would be saved. We found out it is an ongoing problem."

The Bay Institute was founded in 1981 to argue at the state level for fresh water flows through the Delta. Grant Davis, Executive Director of the [Bay Institute](#), pointed out that two out of three Californians depend on the watershed of the Bay for their water. Lack of fresh water in the Delta is contributing to the decline of species. The Bay Institute has created the Bay Index, indicators that answer key questions about Bay health. Their scorecard can be found at the [Bay Institute](#).

Stewards for the Health of the Bay

Steve Ritchie, [California Coastal Conservancy](#) and Executive Project Manager of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project, pointed out that although the salt ponds removed tidal habitat in the South Bay they did preserve land from development and provided stops for many migratory birds that found their food in a saltier environment. In 2003 a Framework Agreement led to public acquisition of the salt ponds for \$100 million. The project is preparing a scientifically sound, publicly supported restoration project that can

be implemented within five years. Restoration will begin in 2008. See <http://www.southbayrestoration.org> for more information on the project.

Bruce Wolfe, Executive Officer of the [San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board](#) reported that filling the Bay has almost stopped. We are holding our own on water quality by preserving, controlling, and enhancing all water in the state. Now the Board's efforts are focused on enhancement projects; salt ponds, breaching the dikes at Hamilton Air Base, and rerouting Peyton slough around mountains of waste from a copper plant. He pointed out that floods are caused by paving and building. Water gets to creeks faster because rain cannot be absorbed into the ground nor percolate into the water table. He says he has hope and optimism but we have to get all agencies and stake holders to work together and get the message out.

Laura Thompson, manager of the [San Francisco Bay Trail Project](#) in Oakland pointed out how the Bay Trail benefits the public. It provides recreation for hikers, bicyclists and other outdoor enthusiasts, environmental education, wildlife viewing, and transportation benefits. Approximately 270 miles of the trail are complete. When finished it will extend over 500 miles and link the shoreline of nine counties and 47 cities and cross seven toll bridges.

Commitment to the future

Russell Hancock, CEO of [Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network](#), spoke about Silicon Valley's economy and its effect on the environment. The valley experienced a 220,000 job loss between 2001 and 2005 but since it had added 350,000 jobs leading up to the crash he saw the job loss as a return to normalcy. New growth areas are biotechnology and nanotechnology convergent with regular technology. Both business and the civic community are committed to open space, housing density and air quality. Businesses of the future are environmentally friendly and non-polluting. They are selling ideas. The environment is a huge asset when competing for workers because the workforce loves the outdoors.

San Francisco Bay is essential to the Bay Area sense of place according to Jeff Blanchfield, Chief Planning Officer of the San Francisco [Bay Conservation and Development Commission](#) (BCDC). It is our Eiffel Tower, Big Ben or Niagara Falls. It is what draws people to the Bay Area. Blanchfield says that new workers will be willing to pay for civic amenities because they need a quality of place.

Nadine Hitchcock serves as Program Manager of the San Francisco Bay Program at the [California Coastal Conservancy](#) which was formed in 1976. Recent accomplishments of the agency are the restoration of 1,000 acres of tidelands, acquisition of 100,000 acres of tidelands and leading efforts to eradication of Spartina, an aggressive non-native Atlantic cordgrass on 1,000 acres of mudflats and restored tidal marshes. Hitchcock said the Conservancy has enhanced or restored 20,000 acres of Baylands but the needs for the future are a regional vision, scientifically quantifiable economic benefits, new partners, and greater citizen involvement.

Before 1850 the status of the San Francisco Bay was determined by nature. After 1850 it was determined by people according to David Lewis of [Save the Bay](#). This organization is trying to "get people to wake up" and learn how we have an impact on the Bay. Lewis feels that people need a direct experience with the Bay. Taking people to the bay opens possibilities for people to learn that we can't just be for the right things; we need to do something about it.

The [Jack London Aquatic Center](#), JLAC, is a non-profit organization. They constructed and operate the JLAC boathouse located in Oakland's Estuary Park. Robert Kidd, president of the board of directors said that the organization's purpose was to bring children from low-income areas to the bay to experience water activities such as rowing. They ran into unexpected barriers. The children had no transportation to get them from school to the boathouse. They were afraid of the water because they couldn't swim. JLAC had to deal with these issues before they could proceed with their original purpose. His point was that you need to look at the bigger picture when you are planning an activity.

As some of the speakers emphasized, the key to keeping the Bay open and improving its health is getting people out to see it, and understand its importance to all who live here—plants, birds, people and other animals. Many are endangered. Direct access to the Bay wetlands and shores is available at various Baylands parks—Sunnyvale, Mountain View, Palo Alto—and particularly at learning centers with exhibits and programs such as Alviso, Palo Alto Baylands and the Don Edwards education centers in Alviso and across the Dumbarton Bridge.

Roberta Hollimon and Louise Levy