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SAVE THE BAY PROJECTS COST OF RESTORING BAY WETLANDS AT \$1.43 BILLION
“Greening the Bay” Report Recommends Bay Special District to Secure
San Francisco Bay Wetland Restoration Funding

OAKLAND – August 28, 2007 – Today Save The Bay released a report that documents – for the first time – the total projected cost to nearly double tidal wetlands in San Francisco Bay, from Vallejo to San Jose. *“Greening the Bay: Financing Wetland Restoration in San Francisco Bay”* identifies inadequate funding as the greatest barrier to re-establishing 100,000 acres of tidal wetlands, critical habitat that scientists say is needed for a healthy Bay.

Save The Bay projects that it will cost up to \$1.43 billion over 50 years to fully restore 36,176 acres of shoreline property that is already in public ownership and slated for tidal wetland restoration. Some \$370 million has already been invested to acquire property and plan these restoration projects.

“Today we have a historic opportunity to secure a healthy future for San Francisco Bay for wildlife and people,” said Save The Bay Executive Director David Lewis. “With a modest annual average investment over 50 years – **equivalent to \$4 annually for each Bay Area resident** – we can restore thousands of acres of thriving wetlands on the shoreline and reverse more than a century of degradation that reduced the size of our Bay by one-third.”

Save The Bay recommends that a combination of local, state and federal dollars should finance the restoration and encourages the immediate establishment of a Bay special district. A special district could explore new ways to raise public funds in the Bay Area to restore tidal wetlands along the shoreline.

Overwhelming Public Support for Bay Restoration

Bay Area polling indicates that there is overwhelming public support for Bay restoration and willingness to bear the cost. In a recent EMC Research poll, a strong majority of Bay Area residents say they would make this kind of investment: **83 percent** of residents polled by said they would be willing to pay **\$10 per year** in taxes or fees to restore wetlands that would result in cleaner Bay water, provide flood control benefits, enlarge the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge and increase shoreline access for the public (see www.saveSFbay.org/greeningthebay for full poll results).

Only Five Percent of Bay’s Original Wetlands Remain

Mass urbanization has drastically altered the Bay. People have diked and drained marshes to create agricultural fields and salt ponds and filled wetlands for development. Today, only five percent of the Bay’s original wetlands remain. In 1999, the *Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals* report detailed where and how much Bay shoreline habitat should be reestablished to make the Bay ecosystem healthier. That report recommended restoring shoreline sites to increase tidal wetlands acreage to a total of 100,000 acres around the Bay, recreating vital, productive habitat that was nearly eliminated.

Making Progress Toward 100,000 Acre Goal

In 1999, when the *Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals* was published, about 40,000 acres of tidal wetlands existed in the Bay – 60,000 acres short of the 100,000 acre goal. Since then full tidal action has been restored to additional shoreline areas in Napa, Hayward, Oakland and other sites. Government agencies such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the California Department of Fish and Game and the California Coastal Conservancy, and private organizations and land trusts have purchased an additional 36,176 acres of restorable Bay shoreline. Completing these planned restoration projects will nearly double the Bay’s tidal marsh. To reach the 100,000 acre goal, an additional 22,912 acres will need to be purchased and restored from remaining diked historic baylands and salt ponds. Specific project sites have not yet been determined and the \$1.43 billion estimate does not include the future cost of purchasing and restoring these acres.

The current largest and highest-profile Bay restoration opportunity is the South Bay Salt Ponds, which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Game purchased from Cargill Salt in 2003. Other significant restoration projects include Bair Island in Redwood City, Napa-Sonoma Marsh, Hamilton Field/Bel Marin Keys in Novato and Sears Point.

Lack of Funding Greatest Obstacle to Successful Wetland Restoration

Save The Bay and many other partners are working to achieve this vision of 100,000 acres of healthy, thriving wetlands around the Bay – but the lack of steady, reliable funding to implement wetland restoration opportunities already in public ownership is the greatest obstacle to success. Consistent funding is vital for future acquisition, planning, on-the-ground construction, and operations and maintenance, including modifying levees and protecting electric transmission lines and other existing infrastructure.

Regional Special District to Oversee Wetland Restoration Funding Needed

San Francisco Bay lacks a single, regional body with the power to raise funds dedicated to restoring, maintaining and enhancing Bay shoreline sites. Save The Bay recommends that a regional special district be established immediately to explore, promote and coordinate local and regional public fundraising mechanisms, and to develop priorities and sequencing for allocating funds for Bay restoration projects. The special district should have a governance structure that ensures efficient and successful operations – this may include representatives from key state, regional or local agencies, elected officials, and other appropriate stakeholders.

To ensure adequate revenue for Bay restoration Save The Bay also recommends:

➤ **State and local resource bonds and other public sources should provide significant funds for Bay restoration.**

Bay Area voters have overwhelmingly supported the last four statewide natural resource bonds, yet Bay projects have received a disproportionately small fraction (one percent) of the \$13.5 billion those measures contained for open space and park protection, water quality improvements, acquisition of public lands and wetland restoration.

➤ **The San Francisco Bay Area congressional delegation should make full funding of the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Complex a high priority.**

Of the major Bay wetland restoration projects in progress, 13,286 acres are located on refuge land. Federal funding for the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Complex, which includes the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge – which is nation's largest urban wildlife, with 700,000 annual visitors – and six other area refuge units has not kept pace with the massive increase in its size and land management needs. In 2003, the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge grew by one-third in size without a comparable increase in budget, when the federal government purchased 9,600 acres of salt ponds in the South Bay. It is vital that Congress increase the baseline budget for operations and maintenance of Bay refuges.

Bay Wetlands Provide Numerous Benefits to Bay Area Residents

Wetlands are the lungs of the Bay, giving life to hundreds of fish and wildlife species that depend on them for survival and billions of small organisms that thrive in Bay mud to form the base of the food chain. In addition to providing vital habitat for fish and wildlife, wetlands provide major benefits to the community:

- **Clean water** - Healthy Bay wetlands trap polluted runoff before toxics can reach open Bay water
- **Economic benefits** - A 1992 case study estimated that California's wetlands provided as much as \$22.9 billion in value to the state annually
- **Helps Curb Global Warming** - Scientists have found that tidal salt marshes capture carbon from greenhouse gases in the air efficiently and effectively, helping to counter global warming
- **Flood and Erosion Control** - Wetlands act as sponges, slowing down and soaking up large quantities of water runoff during rainstorms and tidal inflow

"The Bay is natural treasure that defines our region, provides recreation and beauty, moderates our climate, and generates many millions of dollars in economic benefits. It is a thriving ecosystem that touches nine counties and millions of people," said Lewis. "Over the last four decades, dedicated Bay Area residents have overcome overwhelming odds to prevent San Francisco Bay from being destroyed. The Bay needs to be protected and restored as one entity, by and for the whole region. By securing the funds necessary to fully restore Bay wetlands now, we can make the Bay healthier for people and wildlife long into the future."

About Save The Bay

Save The Bay is the oldest and largest membership organization working exclusively to protect, restore and celebrate San Francisco Bay. As the Bay's leading champion since 1961, Save The Bay is committed to making the Bay cleaner and healthier and connecting residents to it. Save The Bay wages and wins effective advocacy campaigns to increase public access to the Bay, establish 100,000 acres of healthy wetlands around the Bay, and protect the Bay from today's greatest threats: urban sprawl and pollution. This year, we will educate 10,000 students and adults on the Bay and engage thousands of volunteers to improve 100 acres of wetlands and subtidal habitats by hand for fish and wildlife. www.saveSFbay.org

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