

watershed

San Francisco Bay in the Aftermath of the Cosco Busan Oil Spill

Demanding Restitution and Continuing Work to Restore Wetlands

On November 7, the freighter Cosco Busan struck a bumper protecting the Bay Bridge, gashing a hole in the ship and spewing 58,000 gallons of toxic bunker fuel into our beloved Bay.

The spill affected us all. Some effects were obvious: dead and injured birds, fouled shoreline and idle fishing fleets. Others were more subtle: poisoned fish and wildlife.

“This oil spill is a tragedy for the Bay,” said David Lewis, Save The Bay’s Executive Director. “I was alarmed that this oil spill happened, outraged at the inadequate preparations and response, and appalled at the destruction.”

Save The Bay’s office was inundated with calls from public officials and concerned citizens desiring to learn more and to help.

In the hours following the disaster, Save The Bay staff rallied to do what we could:

- Providing accurate information through our Web site and email alerts;
- Helping government resource agencies, including our restoration partners, assess the damage; and
- Guiding elected officials’ inquiries into the spill’s causes and effects to improve response plans and ensure restitution.

A resolute Lewis led Save The Bay through this crisis, regularly updating and consulting with staff and encouraging all to persevere with our important work to restore and protect our wounded Bay.

Lewis gave dozens of media interviews

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



Help Save The Bay build healthy wetlands around the Bay. Please sign up at saveSFbay.org

- Plant native seedlings at Eden Landing in Hayward, Saturday, February 2
- Kayak to the Marin Islands and restore habitat, Saturday, February 9 and March 22
- Help plant natives at the Palo Alto Baylands, Wednesday, February 13
- Canoe to Bair Island and restore habitat, Saturday, February 23 and Saturday, March 8
- Be sure to check our website for our April 19 Earth Day events – coming soon!

SAVE THE BAY
www.saveSFbay.org



Holding Our Breath...

Toxic Oil Imperils Vulnerable Bay Species

One of the most pressing questions following the November 7 oil spill is, how are wildlife faring? The answers are still being assessed, but range from bad to worse.

“This fall we found oyster settlement for the first time ever in three locations, and our eelgrass shoots were rapidly growing,” said Marilyn Latta, Save The Bay’s Habitat Restoration Director, describing project results. “But in the aftermath of the spill we aren’t sure about the future for these species.”

Tragically, at press time, more than 2,000 birds had perished, and scientists estimate that tens of thousands more had been killed. Less visible to the public eye are countless underwater plants and animals that have died or are in peril as a result of the oil.

San Francisco Bay, one of the most productive ecosystems on the planet, holds more life per square inch than the Amazon rainforest! Bay wetlands are a protected nursery for newborn fish, birds and marine mammals, and a resting place for millions of migratory birds, making the Bay a deadly location for a toxic spill.

The bunker fuel was a sludgy mix, essentially nine parts tar to one part home heating oil. Once in the Bay, a small portion evaporated and some thinned out to form an ominous sheen. Most remained tarlike, sticking to rocks or washing up on shorelines from Bolinas to Pacifica, San Rafael to San Francisco, and San Leandro to Richmond.

Birds were the most visible casualties: oil-covered feathers compromised their insulation system, resulting in hypothermia and death. Other animals ingested the sticky oil, causing ulceration of tissues.

Oiled wildlife that survive are often too weak to reproduce.

The oil had serious impacts on underwater life. For the past several years, Save The Bay and partners have been restoring oysters and eelgrass, underwater species that had significantly dwindled in the last century from loss of habitat and pollution. Now the oil spill has further threatened them.

Save The Bay’s eelgrass restoration partner Dr. Katharyn Boyer (Assistant Professor of Biology, Romberg Tiburon Center, SF State University) explains that she was “overwhelmed” by the potential for chronic effects of oil in eelgrass habitats. She speculated that oil could render this underwater vegetation unable to photosynthesize and ultimately, unable to reproduce. Prior to the spill, Boyer had been worried about the young plants at new restoration sites surviving through winter storms. “Unfortunately, this spill may be the stressor that tips the balance in the wrong direction.”

Harm to habitat and wildlife from the oil spill is being assessed through Natural Resources Damage Assessments, led by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the California Department of Fish and Game and other state and federal agencies. Scientists are monitoring Bay resources including fish, birds, marine mammals, beaches, wetlands, eelgrass, oysters, rocky intertidal zones and recreational areas. The researchers must use a meticulous process to prove that the damage originated from the Cosco Busan spill. Any proof found will be used in court and/or negotiations with the responsible parties.

Part of the Damage Assessment team is Natalie Cosentino-Manning, Marine Restoration Specialist for NOAA and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



RUSS JUSKALIAN



FRIENDS OF FIVE CREEKS



MARILYN LATTA

watershed

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More Important Now than Ever: Protecting the Bay

The Cosco Busan oil spill is devastating for the Bay and the fish and wildlife that live in it. My personal sadness and frustration have become embarrassment at the appalling failures of prevention, planning and response by state and federal agencies, for which the Bay pays dearly.

I'm proud that Save The Bay provided accurate, timely spill information for volunteers, the news media and elected officials. Our staff and volunteers helped wildlife agencies document the oil's impacts and photograph the damage by submitting over 180 photographs to Natural Resource Damage Assessment teams and noting impacts to sensitive eelgrass and oyster beds. We've given input on investigative hearings and draft legislation, and demanded restitution to compensate and restore the Bay.

Chillingly, this was only a modest spill, so it serves as a wake-up call to improve vessel security, ship traffic control and hazardous material handling. Save The Bay supports independent investigations that recommend improvements in preparation for future spills, like more emergency drills, pre-deployment of containment booms and skimmers, integration of trained personnel from area cities and plans to train and deploy volunteers quickly.

The overwhelming outpouring of concern from the entire Bay Area also

reaffirms how important the Bay is to our region's quality of life and makes me optimistic for the Bay. I'm touched by the tremendous volunteer offers and donations from our members, area residents and businesses. This deep community support is our greatest asset to make the Bay healthier.

We are now rededicating ourselves to priority work that is even more important for the Bay after the oil spill:

- Accelerate the restoration of 40,000 acres of shoreline habitat on property already acquired for that purpose, to re-establish 100,000 acres of Bay tidal marsh;
- Defeat Cargill's effort to fill in the Bay and develop housing on retired salt ponds in Redwood City, so that the former wetlands can instead be restored and added to the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Complex; and
- Tighten restrictions on trash and other pollutants that daily enter the Bay and coastal waters in storm water runoff, poisoning fish and wildlife and their habitat.

Your ongoing support will help us reach these goals—thank you for your concern and dedication!

David Lewis



CHRONICLE PHOTO BY KATY RADDATZ

▲ *At the request of U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, David Lewis testified at a Congressional Hearing into the spill.*



FRIENDS OF FIVE CREEKS



MARILYN LATTA

▲ *Oil from the Cosco Busan washed up on shorelines throughout the Bay. Sticky, toxic oil coated the rocks at Kiel Cove in Tiburon.*

HOLDING OUR BREATH | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 2
Save The Bay partner. She is analyzing native oyster tissue for the presence of hydrocarbons. She explains that the extent of the damage to natural resources isn't yet known, "But the good news is that because

of the recent successes in our work, we now have tested techniques to help restore populations that are damaged by the spill...We are holding our breath and hoping for the survival of the most vulnerable species."

By Jessica Castelli and Athena Honore

NEWSLETTER INSIDE

Help Save the Bay!

Help us plant 30,000 native seedlings at wetland sites around the Bay this winter. We also welcome donations to Save The Bay's Bay Emergency Response Fund. For more information, please go to saveSFbay.org, or call us at 510-452-9261.

THE AFTERMATH | CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

and testified, at U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's request, at a field hearing of the Transportation and Infrastructure's Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation.

He shared with members of Congress a grave concern felt by all at Save The Bay: "Oil is already entering the food chain, and whatever is not removed from the Bay could continue releasing toxins for decades." Lewis emphasized the need to move forward with improved procedures for Bay navigation, disaster preparedness and protection, and to ensure that those responsible will foot the bill for necessary restoration.

Lewis also spoke about the need for federal and state legislators and agencies to protect this natural and economic resource by accelerating the restoration of tens of thousands of acres of shoreline habitat, tightening restrictions on trash and other runoff pollutants, and stepping up the enforcement of clean water laws.

The entire Save The Bay staff agrees that the light in this dark time came from the hundreds of members, partners and others who expressed concern and support. Corporations and foundations, such as Wachovia and the San Francisco Foundation, donated emergency funds. In the weekend following the spill, Save The Bay received a month's worth of donations.

Moving forward, Save The Bay's restoration work is more important now than ever before. Our goal of establishing 100,000 acres of healthy wetlands is of paramount importance. Healthy wetlands provide a first line of defense for Bay life in the case of disasters such as this.

While continuing important, ongoing work to protect and restore the Bay, Save The Bay will stay focused on the oil spill restitution. As Lewis explains, "We will insist on compensation from the responsible parties to restore the Bay for wildlife and habitat destroyed by this spill."

By Marguerite Sprague

