



PICKLEWEED POST

Friends of San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge Newsletter

VOLUME 11

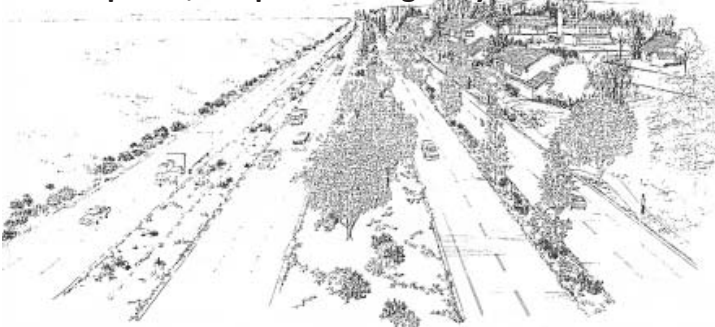
FEBRUARY 2015

Restored After More Than a Century!!

On January 6, 2015, at 12:41 PM, the excavator's scoop breached the levee and for the first time in 135 years, tidal waters flowed into Cullinan Ranch. Years of poor environmental planning and political battles were over and 1,500 acres began the process of restoration to tidal wetlands. This issue of the Pickleweed Post is dedicated to the handful of vigilant individuals who persisted and prevailed. The first picture below on the left was taken on January 6th, before the breach. The middle picture on the left shows the breach site just minutes after the first flow of tidal water. The first and middle pictures on the right were taken one month after the breach from the same vantage point as the corresponding picture on the left.



The Proposed, "Improved" Highway 37 Plan



The Implemented, Improved Highway 37 Plan

For more information, please contact us at: friendsofspbnwr@coconutmoon.com, or check out what's going on at www.pickleweed.org



The following is the presentation given by Friends of the San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge President, Francesca Demgen (pictured on the left) at the breaching ceremony on January 6, 2015.

Breaching Ceremony Viewed by Hundreds

Being engaged in government is one of our most important responsibilities as citizens. Involvement is especially critical when you hold a divergent view and sometimes, just sometimes perseverance pays off. Today we are witnessing how wildly successful a handful of committed folks supported by a large group of believers can be!

Look around at this beautiful place, on a clear day both Mt. Diablo and Mt. Tam are visible from here. Let's start the story by visualizing some of the changes that have occurred here over time and led to the development proposal.

- 15,000 years ago there was no San Francisco Bay. The polar ice caps incorporated more of the earth's water so Cullinan was dry.
- As much as 3,500 years ago indigenous people hunted tule elk with obsidian arrow points knapped from a Napa County volcano, trapped salmon with nets, and cultivated marsh grasses and roots for basketry for centuries
- In 1856 the U.S. Coast Survey mapped Cullinan as a fully developed wetland and tidal channel network located between Boat Cutoff Slough (now called Dutchman Slough) and San Pablo Bay.
- Cullinan was diked in the 1880s for ranching, primarily cultivating oat hay because it grows despite the salty, soggy soil.

That brings us to the 1983 grand plan to build 3,000 single family houses, 1,500 apartments and condominiums, 1,700 boat slips, and 60 acres of offices and shops. What an enchanting place to live — at the water's edge, tying your boat up right outside your back door. It sounded great; until we understood that this beautiful waterfront development was going to be located right here, on the first large, privately held parcel west of the Napa River. The implications for the entire corridor were obvious and evoked a loud, collective community gasp that resounded around the bay. A group coalesced and we named ourselves Citizens for Cost Efficient Growth, or Cost, for short. While we were environmentally motivated, we were concerned the general public would be more swayed by the financial folly. For example, the plan called for importing 13.2 million cubic yards (MCY) of fill to compensate for up to 6 feet of ground surface subsidence caused by decades of pumping to drain the soils for agriculture. Importing 13.2 MCY would equate to hauling sufficient soil to fill 8 rows of dump trucks lined-up between LA and San Francisco.

In the end what mattered was our mailing list of 75 or so, folks from far and wide who supported and advised a local core of Vallejoans who gathered, pondered, studied, and gave public testimony at every local and regional meeting where the plan was being considered.

Our testimony fell on deaf ears. The County Supervisors and LAFCO approved annexation of the ranch to Vallejo; the Vallejo Planning Commission followed by the City Council, approved the EIR for the development. The development was to move forward. Only one alternative remained, the group raised \$40K for a lawsuit centering on inadequacies in the Environmental Impact Report. BCDC and the State AG supported Attorney Clem Schute's winning case which did two things: 1) told the City and the developer where and how to fix the EIR and 2) raised awareness enough that in 1985 the Army Corps and the State Lands Commission denied the developer's permits.

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The group realized that public ownership was the only way to protect Cullinan Ranch from development. We turned to then Congressional Representative Barbara Boxer, who secured seven million dollars in Land and Water Conservation funds to purchase Cullinan Ranch and add it to San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge in 1991.

The choices we make determine the lives we lead. We are standing here today because a group of folks chose involvement over apathy, analyzed EIR sections instead of watching TV at night after dinner, traveled the full circle from outrage to public acquisition of an oat hay ranch and seasonal wetland soon to flourish from the introduction of free flowing Pacific Ocean tides, the Napa River and beyond.

The breaching here at Cullinan brings the total to more than 35,500 acres of wetland between the Napa and Petaluma Rivers, more than 55 square miles under the stewardship of state and Federal wildlife agencies who's staff spend their lives protecting and enhancing our natural resources.

Democracy works best when the community is engaged. I want to invite everyone to stand who was a member of the Cost team; acknowledge the many who are unable to join us today and say thanks! Here's to the continued collaboration of citizens, civil servants, and politicians because together we are strong and successful.



What was with those big white blocks along Highway 37!?

No secret to those traveling along State Route 37 (SR37) that a lot of construction was going on for a couple years and spilling into 2015. All that work culminated into a wildlife observation deck and fishing pier, a canoe kayak facility, interpretive kiosks, a public restroom, a 1.3 mile trail, and deceleration/acceleration lanes for people to use when they visit the newly flooded 1,500 acre Cullinan Ranch Unit of San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge. But what was with them white blocks?

SR37 was built along the edge of the Bay on top of what was formerly estuary. Estuary - habitat formed where the sea meets freshwater and the mingling of nutrients and minerals creates a highly productive ecosystem. However, estuary is a softy mucky surface to build anything on, and that 'anything' will sink over time. The restoration of Cullinan Ranch called for a gradually tapering slope coming off the north side of the levee supporting SR37. This slope is transition zone where a variety of narrow habitats will form helping increase habitat diversity, resiliency to sea level rise, and protect the road from erosion during storm events. Building this slope required removing the vegetation which freaked a lot of SR37 users as they suddenly saw what the vegetation had been concealing all those years! A precipitous slope!

Considerable amounts of soil were to be placed against the SR37 levee to form the gradual slope. Remember, SR37 is sinking, the restoration was not to accelerate this process. So, a portion of the gradual slope was engineered with what's called a low-load fill, or, low-weight fill. This could be done in a costly manner using pumice, y'know, the floating rocks, or . . . get this, geofabric. Geofabric? Yeah, a very densely compacted material similar to those inexpensive party coolers atop the frozen foods refrigerators at your grocers. Those big white blocks were the size of household refrigerators, weighed nearly nothin', yet could support a cement truck. What they did was provide the bulk without the weight in the slope. Oh, they'll last for a long time and will last longer as they've been wrapped in a membrane to protect them from petroleum products, which hopefully won't get into the newly flooded Cullinan Ranch Unit. And that's what's with them big white blocks. (*Don Brubaker, Refuge Manager*)

California Native Plant Society Plant Sale and Wildflower Show

This April, come see one of the finest displays of native flora in the state and make your neighbors jealous with some rare additions to your yard! Your Napa Valley Chapter of the California Native Plant Society is excited to announce its annual Plant Sale and Wildflower Show happening April 11th & 12th at Skyline Park. We will be showcasing an excellent selection of hard-to-find native plants that are ready for your spring gardens, with experts on hand to answer any questions. Enjoy free admission to Skyline Park during the sale and come find inspiration for your own yard or garden by seeing these plants in a landscape setting at the adjacent Martha Walker California Native Habitat Garden. We also have over 200 native Californian plants and wildflowers on display at the Wildflower Show, with identifications for you to impress even your sagest friends with your knowledge of native plant life. All sale proceeds benefit the maintenance, improvement, and educational programs of the Martha Walker Garden.

April 11 & 12
Plant Sale and Wildflower Show
10 AM TO 4 PM
Social Hall, Skyline Park, 2201 Imola Ave.
Napa 94559
707-253-2665

For additional information visit www.napavalleycnps.org.



Save the Date

May 2 - BBQ open to the public at the Refuge Headquarters,
7715 Lakeville Hwy, Petaluma - 1 PM

Yes, I would like to join the Friends and help protect the wildlife and support the Refuges.

Please fill out, enclose with your donation and mail to:

Friends of the San Pablo Bay NWR
Membership
7715 Lakeville Highway
Petaluma, CA 94954
707-769-4200

- Pickleweed Pal \$25
- Marsh Wren \$50
- Clapper Rail \$100
- Harvest Mouse Helper \$250
- Great Blue Heron Hero \$500
- Saltmarsh Sponsor \$1,000
- White Pelican Patron \$2,500
- Tidal Marsh Mentor \$5,000
- Great Egret Guardian \$10,000
- Baylands Benefactor \$25,000
- Other \$ _____

I am interested in becoming a Friends Board Member

Name

Address

City

State

Zip

Telephone

Email Address

Signature

Thank You!
Your membership contribution
is tax deductible.