



PICKLEWEED POST

Friends of San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge Newsletter

VOLUME 15

FEBRUARY 2019

Forty-Three Years and Counting!! Environmental Researcher, Protector and Activist

Francesca Demgen just finished a master's degree in Environmental Science from Washington State University. Upon returning home, a job advertisement at the local library caught her attention. The Mountain View Sanitation District needed a biologist. A quick train ride, interview and move to California launched what would become a decades-long career as a wetlands ecologist and environmental activist.

Fran's professional career as a wetland ecologist spans almost 40 years of research and restoration work from the Napa River to San Jose. Fran managed the Ecosystem Restoration Group for the United Research Services (now ACEOM) Oakland office and led numerous projects focused on water quality, flood control, hydrologic modeling, California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) compliance, wetland restoration, habitat creation, endangered species habitat enhancement, aquatic wildlife distribution, fish surveys and plant species distribution. In addition, Fran taught wetlands related subjects at local colleges and universities and served as a school board member for the Vallejo Unified School District. Fran has made countless presentations to school children and leads children and adults on field trips throughout the marshlands of the greater San Francisco Bay Area.

In 1982, a developer from Huntington Beach submitted a proposal to the city of Vallejo to build 3,000 single family homes, 1,500 condominiums, two marinas, a large shopping mall and a commercial and industrial development on a 1,500-acre property known as Cullinan Ranch. This area, along the north side of Highway 37 and east of the San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge, was originally marshland, but following the construction of levees, had been farmed in oat hay for almost 100 years.

Early in 1983, Vallejoans For Cost Efficient Growth (COST) was formed to organize people who believe that the proposed development of the Cullinan Ranch property should not occur. Fran was a founding member. There were numerous environmental concerns with the project including the destruction of habitat for two federally endangered species: the Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse and the Ridgway's Rail (formerly known as the California Clapper Rail). It was a long and exhausting 5-year battle, but in 1987 COST, along with a coalition of supporters including the Audubon Society, the Sierra Club and the Save San Francisco Bay Association, succeeded in defeating the proposal.



Board member Paul Amato presenting Francesca Demgen with the plaque honoring her 11-year service as President of the Friends group and for her successful preservation and restoration of Cullinan Ranch tidal marsh.

Fortunately, the story doesn't end there. Fran, along with many others, truly wanted the land returned to its natural state: tidal marshland. In 2003, a group of concerned environmentalists, including Fran, founded the Friends of the San Pablo National Wildlife Refuge to support the Refuge through restoration and public education. It took 13 years and the coordinated efforts of the Refuge staff, the Friends group and many other agencies, but on January 6, 2015, the levee that turned a 1,500-acre marshland into an oat hay field was breached restoring tidal connection to the bay. It will take some time to change the past, but Cullinan Ranch is returning to tidal marshland and already providing great benefits to wildlife, people, and the bay.

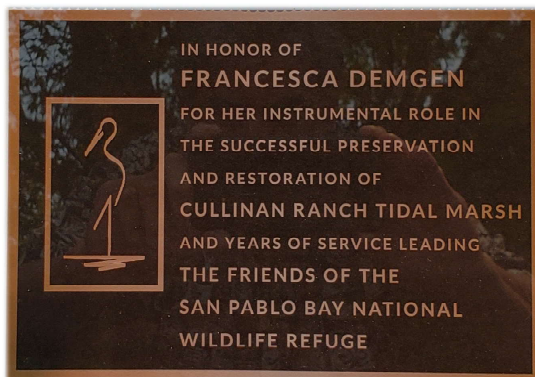
The San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge boundary was established in 1970, but the first parcel of land was not acquired until 1974; the 185 acre Figueras unit. Today, through the joint efforts of many organizations and the coordination of work between the Friends group and the National Wildlife Refuge staff, the Refuge occupies 19,965 acres, of which approximately 13,000 acres are open to the public for activities such as hunting, fishing, hiking, bicycling, wildlife viewing and photography. Looking forward, preservation, restoration and education will be a major focus for all of us associated with one of the most unique natural areas of the San Francisco Bay estuary - the San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge.

Those who have worked with Fran know her as hard working, intelligent and extremely caring. In the words of Meg Marriott, Wildlife Biologist, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, "...even though I have not worked much with Francesca in an official capacity, I know her to be one of the kindest, most generous and helpful people in my life. She is just as willing and quick to help you out as a friend as she is as a co-worker. I have always been so impressed and so grateful to her for this quality."

After 11 years, Fran has turned over the President's gavel, but continues as an active board member. We are so thankful for her dedication and service and look forward to many more years working with and learning from Fran.



Cullinan Ranch levee breach, January 6, 2015



A bronze version of this plaque honoring the contributions of Francesca Demgen will be placed on a bench overlooking the Cullinan Ranch Tidal Marsh.

Opportunities for Visitors to the San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge

Wildlife Viewing

The Cullinan Ranch Trail, Sonoma Baylands Trail, Sears Point Trails, and the Tolay Creek Trail and habitats surrounding the San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge offer ample opportunities to see wildlife. Situated along the Pacific Flyway, the region where birds migrate through western United States, the refuge and the estuary is an important wintering area for waterfowl, particularly canvasbacks, scaup, and scoters. Shorebirds also use the area to overwinter or as a stopover point during migration.

Special group tours are also available to Skaggs Island. Skaggs Island is a great place to see several species of raptors, and the occasional black-tailed deer. Contact the Refuge manager if you would like to schedule a group tour.

Interpretation

Refuge System interpretative programs provide opportunities for visitors to make their own connections to the natural world. From self-guided walks to ranger-led programs, many national wildlife refuges help visitors learn more about the wildlife and habitat behind the landscapes.

In addition to staff and volunteers presenting programs to audiences, refuges use a variety of exhibits, signs, brochures, and electronic media to communicate natural history stories to visitors. Printed and virtual information is often available on many topics, including plants and animals, seasonal migrations, habitats, refuge management strategies, and endangered species.

Environmental Education

National Wildlife Refuges serve many purposes, and one of our most important roles is serving as an outdoor classroom to teach about wildlife and natural resources. Many refuges offer environmental education programs for a variety of audiences. Refuges provide unique and exciting outdoor environments – excellent locations for hands-on learning activities. Thousands of youth and adult groups visit every year to learn about a specific topic on wildlife, habitat, or ecological processes.

Is your school, youth, environmental or other group interested in learning more about the wildlife, plants, habitats and ecology of a particular national wildlife refuge? Contact the Refuge manager for more information. Refuges are wild places, and we want to teach you more about them!

Boating

Human-powered crafts offer wildlife watching from a different perspective. An accessible boat launch designed for kayaks and canoes is available at the Cullinan Ranch Unit. A gravel boat ramp for launching canoes and kayaks is available at Sears Point. Please be aware that these areas are tidal and caution is necessary when navigating through the breaches.

Opportunities for Visitors to the San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge (Continued)

Photography

Perhaps the fastest growing activity on national wildlife refuges in the past ten years has been wildlife photography. That's not surprising – the digital camera population explosion and cell phones with ever-improving picture-taking abilities are increasing the number of nature photographers at a rapid rate. You don't need to purchase expensive equipment or have any experience to get started. A small camera or basic cell phone will do just fine for most visitors.

Wildlife photography is a high-priority activity in the Refuge System. We welcome beginning and expert photographers alike to record their outdoor adventures on film, memory card or internal hard drive!

Fishing and Hunting

In addition to the conservation of wildlife and habitat, the Refuge System offers a variety of quality fishing opportunities. Fishing programs promote understanding and appreciation of natural resources and their management on all lands and waters in the Refuge System. Currently, fishing is available in the open bay and navigable sloughs of San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge. There is also a fishing pier located at the parking lot of Cullinan Ranch. Boat ramps are available at the Vallejo public marina and at the Hudeman Slough Boat Launch, located at 28020 Skaggs Island Road in Sonoma. Waterfowl hunting is now open at Cullinan and Sears Point.

Save the Date
Skaggs Island Bike Ride
Saturday, May 18, 2019

Support Your Refuge
Donate online at:

www.sanpablobayrefugefriends.org

Yes, I would like to make a contribution or 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
7715 Lakeville Hwy.
Petaluma, CA 94954
707-769-4200

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

☐ **I would like to make a one-time contribution of \$**

☐ **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.