

**TESTIMONY OF DAVID LEWIS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF SAVE THE BAY**

**ON H.R. 6479
SAN FRANCISCO BAY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE COMPLEX
ESTABLISHMENT ACT**

**BEFORE THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS**

SEPTEMBER 10, 2008

Madam Chairwoman and members of the subcommittee – thank you for the opportunity to testify today in strong support of H.R. 6479. I am David Lewis, Executive Director of Save The Bay, the oldest and largest organization that works exclusively to protect and restore San Francisco Bay. We were founded in 1961 to prevent the Bay from being filled in for development, and we have more than 25,000 supporters, many actively helping to restore Bay habitat with their own hands.

The Bay Area's quality of life and economy depend on a healthy and vibrant Bay. San Francisco Bay defines our region and its identity, provides recreation and beauty, and is the engine of our economy, attracting tourists and businesses from around the world. Save The Bay's work has made the Bay cleaner and healthier, and reconnected residents to it. We involve thousands of volunteers annually to restore the Bay's shoreline, and have educated more than 40,000 students on the Bay's waters over the last decade.

H.R. 6479 would establish the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Complex, to include seven existing National Wildlife Refuges in the San Francisco and Monterey Bay Areas. This Complex of refuges needs the Department of Interior's focused attention and increased resources for habitat restoration and other purposes. H.R. 6479 provides the statutory authority to manage and enhance those special places to benefit wildlife and people, furthering the mission and purpose of the Refuge System as authorized under the National Wildlife Refuge Administration Act. We are grateful for the leadership of Representative Stark, and for the co-sponsorship of the entire San Francisco Bay and Monterey Bay area delegations.



Greening the Bay Report

Last year, Save The Bay released a report, *Greening the Bay: Financing Wetland Restoration in San Francisco Bay*. I have provided the subcommittee with a full copy of that report for the record. The report is a case statement for re-establishing 100,000 acres of vital tidal marsh habitat around the Bay, and makes recommendations for how to finance habitat restoration on 36,000 acres of property already protected for that purpose. Most of the property awaiting restoration is within the boundaries of existing federal wildlife refuges, including refuges whose management H.R. 6479 would advance.

As H.R. 6479's findings underscore, San Francisco Bay is the largest estuary on the West Coast and is home to 500 species of wildlife, including 128 threatened or endangered species. The Bay is a crucial resting spot for millions of migrating birds on the Pacific Flyway, and its sheltered waters provide critical nurseries for endangered salmon and other fish. The bay has been designated a site of "Hemispheric Importance" by The Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan has listed it as one of 34 waterfowl habitats of major concern in North America.

Over 150 years, San Francisco Bay has been drastically altered by mass urbanization, and most of its wetlands have been filled to create more land, or diked and drained create agricultural fields and salt ponds, leaving the Bay today one-third smaller than its original size. Although only five percent of the Bay's original wetlands remain intact, they account for 90 percent of California's total remaining tidal wetlands.

Monterey Bay is home to a vital marine sanctuary that protects more than 4,000 square nautical miles of bay and surrounding ocean, including one of the largest underwater canyons in the world. Within or immediately adjacent to the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary are 26 estuarine habitats identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and listed in its National Wetlands Inventory. These estuaries support endangered bird and marine mammal species and include Globally Important Bird Areas.

In 1972, the first congressionally-mandated national wildlife refuge in the country was established in San Francisco Bay, re-named the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge in 1995. It was the nation's first "urban refuge" and remains the largest national wildlife refuge in a metropolitan area. There are seven national wildlife refuges in the region: Antioch Dunes, Don Edwards San Francisco Bay, Ellicott Slough, Farallon, Marin Islands, Salinas River, and San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuges, now comprising more than 46,000 acres.

This Complex of refuges is a wildlife oasis surrounded by intense urban development, so it faces unique challenges within a highly diverse community of more than seven million people. In hosting more than 1.5 million visitors every year, the Complex is

also a powerful economic engine for the Bay Area. In 2006, visits to the Don Edwards San Francisco National Wildlife Refuge alone returned \$43.55 for every \$1 in federal budget expenditures. The Complex's urban setting provides unique opportunities to advance the mission of the national wildlife refuge system, including engagement, education and involvement of new constituencies.

As one example, more than two million people live within a ten-mile radius of the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, the largest of the refuges proposed for inclusion in the Complex, and more than 700,000 visitors explore the refuge every year. Virtually overnight, with the purchase of the South Bay Salt Ponds, the refuge grew in size by one-third without a comparable increase in budget. Staff is now responsible for the operations and maintenance of 70 miles of levees, water control management structures, evaluation and monitoring required by regulatory agencies, the largest habitat restoration project on the west coast, and additional outreach, security and environmental education responsibilities.

Opportunities for Restoring Bay Habitat are Concentrated in Wildlife Refuges

In 1999, the San Francisco Bay Estuary Project published the *Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals*, a consensus, scientific blueprint that identified why a healthy, sustainable San Francisco Bay requires at least 100,000 acres of tidal wetlands. In 1999, 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.

The largest and highest-profile Bay restoration opportunity is the South Bay Salt Ponds Project, on lands 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.

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.

The *Greening the Bay* report's recommendations include providing additional resources to the Bay's federal wildlife refuges, so that they can meet their growing

land management and restoration responsibilities, and can seize the special opportunities before them. H.R. 6479 directly responds to that recommendation.

Of the major Bay wetland restoration projects in progress, 13,286 acres are located on refuge land. Existing and restorable Bay wetlands within the Complex constitute vital habitat for hundreds of fish and wildlife species that need them to survive, including billions of small organisms that thrive in Bay mud to form the base of the food chain. Those wetlands also absorb and filter out many pollutants found in runoff, such as pesticides and fertilizers from farms and gardens, and motor oil from cars. Restored wetlands within the complex can provide cost-effective shoreline protection, and significant flood control and dredging cost savings per acre compared to engineered dams, reservoirs and channels.

Existing and potential wetlands within the Complex can provide significant benefit to counter global warming and the prospect of sea-level rise; the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has determined that because wetlands are inherently highly productive and accumulate large below-ground stocks of organic carbon, restoring wetlands and protecting those that remain represents an immediate and large opportunity for enhancing terrestrial carbon sequestration.

Refuges Have Grown Without Comparable Budget Increases

The increased size and operational requirements of the Complex have not been accompanied by a comparable increase in budget or staff. This funding shortfall threatens the Refuge Complex's ability to manage large, priority restoration projects within its boundaries, including the South Bay Salt Ponds, Bair Island, and Cullinan Ranch.

Because total funding for national wildlife refuges has remained flat or decreased, it is even more important that the Administration and Congress find ways to provide adequate resources for operations and maintenance of Bay refuges. One recent assessment calculated that the Refuge Complex proposed in H.R. 6479 requires \$2.4 million as an addition to its base budget from FY 2008 through FY 2012, to support needed staff, operations and maintenance, and restoration monitoring, and an additional \$28 million in one-time expenditures to implement habitat restoration projects for threatened and endangered species and improve public access facilities.

In the course of their expansion, refuge units within the proposed Complex have already demonstrated innovative public-private partnerships and collaborative conservation approaches, including the contribution of \$35 million from private charitable institutions toward the acquisition of salt ponds and to support initial planning and management of their restoration. Authorizing the Complex through H.R. 6479 will encourage replication of this kind of public-private partnership and further innovation through collaborative conservation.

This Complex of refuges represents a unique national asset within the wildlife refuge system and should be a focal point for cutting edge research, science, and practice in habitat management and restoration, including projects to implement recovery plans for endangered and threatened wildlife species, and habitat conservation plans for tidal marsh and other priority ecosystems. Because of its size, the Complex will also be an ideal setting to test integrated ecosystem management and adaptive approaches to planning and implementation of landscape-scale ecosystem restoration, monitoring the health of key species and the value of habitat, and removal and control of non-native species.

The urban setting of the Complex, with proximity to millions of residents, national and international visitors, presents a wealth of public education and community stewardship opportunities in furtherance of the mission of the federal refuge system. Shoreline projects within the Complex offer special opportunities to develop information on carbon sequestration and natural shoreline protection benefits of tidal marsh restoration in the face of rising sea levels. Restoration projects pursued there will establish and document best practices that can be disseminated and replicated throughout the federal refuge system.

By authorizing the Complex in statute, H.R. 6479 identifies the special opportunity presented by the refuges in the San Francisco and Monterey Bay Areas refuges – they are truly jewels in the crown of the refuge system. H.R. 6479 encourages even more effective management of these refuges and underscores why they should be a high priority for enhanced resources and investment from the Department of Interior for operations and maintenance, habitat restoration and other purposes.

As it highlights tremendous opportunities within this Complex, H.R. 6479 underscores what this subcommittee knows too well – that refuges nationwide have suffered from underfunding during the current Administration and they require more resources in the next.

We encourage you and all members of the Natural Resources Committee to support expeditious enactment of H.R. 6479, and thank you for the opportunity to testify on its behalf today.