

Hamilton Wetland Restoration Plan

Volume II: Final EIR/EIS

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Introduction

The California State Coastal Conservancy (Coastal Conservancy), the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC), and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) are proposing to restore ~~tidal salt marsh~~ wetland habitat at Hamilton Army Airfield (HAAF) and the adjacent California State Lands Commission (SLC) parcel. Approximately 90% of the original tidal wetlands of San Francisco Bay have been destroyed, and this loss has greatly reduced the amount of habitat available to many species of fish and wildlife and has contributed to the listing of several species as endangered. The proposed project ties in or implements many plans or other actions:

- ◆ Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1988 (BRAC),
- ◆ City of Novato General Plan,
- ◆ Hamilton Army Airfield Reuse Plan,
- ◆ San Francisco Bay Plan,
- ◆ San Francisco Estuary Baylands Ecosystem Goals Project,
- ◆ San Francisco Estuary Project Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan,
- ◆ Long-Term Management Strategy for Disposal of Dredged Sediments in San Francisco Bay,
- ◆ CALFED Ecosystem Restoration Plan, and
- ◆ Oakland Harbor Navigation Improvement (50-Foot) Project.

These plans are described more fully in Chapter 2, “Purpose of and Need for the Hamilton Wetland Restoration Plan”, of the environmental impact report/environmental impact statement (EIR/EIS).

The EIR/EIS evaluates the environmental impacts of restoring wetlands on the HAAF and SLC parcels as described in the draft Hamilton Wetlands Conceptual Restoration Plan.

Proposed Action

Project Objectives

The project purpose and need are fully described in Chapter 2. The goal of the Hamilton Wetland Restoration Project is to create a diverse array of wetlands and fish and wildlife habitats that would benefit endangered species as well as other migratory and resident species. Project objectives developed for the project include:

- ◆ to design and engineer a restoration project that stresses simplicity and has little need for active management;
- ◆ to demonstrate the beneficial use of dredged material, if feasible;
- ◆ to recognize existing opportunities and constraints, including the runway and remediation of contaminated areas, as integral components of design;
- ◆ to ensure no net loss of wetland habitat presently provided at the HAAF site;
- ◆ to create and maintain wetland habitats that sustain viable wildlife populations, and, in particular, Bay Area special-status species;
- ◆ to include buffer areas along the upland perimeter of the project area, particularly adjacent to residential areas, so that wildlife will not be impacted by adjacent land uses;
- ◆ to be compatible with adjacent land uses and wildlife habitats; and
- ◆ to provide for public access that is compatible with protection of resource values and regional local public access policies.

Alternatives

The project objectives could be attained by restoring wetlands either through the process of natural sedimentation or by actively placing dredged material on the site. Four wetland restoration alternatives are evaluated in the EIR/EIS. These alternatives include restoration of wetlands in the following areas by the following means:

- ◆ HAAF parcel by natural sedimentation (Alternative 2),
- ◆ HAAF parcel using dredged material (Alternative 3),
- ◆ HAAF and SLC parcels by natural sedimentation (Alternative 4), and
- ◆ HAAF and SLC parcels using dredged material (Alternative 5).

In addition, the No-Action Alternative (Alternative 1) is described in the EIR/EIS, serving as a baseline condition from which to evaluate environmental impacts of the four project alternatives.

The Preferred Alternative

The four project alternatives have been evaluated at an equal level of detail. Coastal Conservancy staff and the Corps have selected Alternative 5 as their preferred alternative because it best meets the project goal and objectives and provides greater diversity of habitat. Under Alternative 5, the use of dredge material would reduce the amount of time necessary for the restored wetlands to become fully functional, the use of dredged material for restoration would help reduce the amount of dredge material that could be disposed of in the bay or the ocean, and the alternative has lower maintenance requirements than alternatives that do not rely on dredged material.

Site Preparation and Wetland Construction

All of the alternatives assume that contaminants will be ~~removed from the site~~ remediated to allow wetland creation and that the current flooding and drainage issues will be resolved by the Army before the site is transferred to the Coastal Conservancy.

All four alternatives involve creating a variety of habitats, including salt marsh, seasonal wetlands, and intertidal and subtidal channels. Only those alternatives using dredged material would involve the creation of tidal pannes. The development of the alternatives involve:

- ◆ relocating and modifying Novato Sanitary District facilities,
- ◆ constructing levees and internal peninsulas,
- ◆ lowering and breaching the bayward levee, and
- ◆ public access.

Alternatives using dredged material (Alternatives 3 and 5) would also require the use of a hydraulic off-loaders_u and piping to transport the dredged material to the site during construction. Alternatives not using dredged material (Alternatives 2 and 4) would require the construction of a cross-panhandle levee to separate the tidal wetland from the seasonal wetlands.

Environmental Consequences

The EIR/EIS evaluates the environmental consequences of the alternatives. A summary of the impact analysis for these alternatives is presented at the end of this chapter (Table S-1). In addition, the California Environmental Quality Act and the National Environmental Policy Act require a review of other issues, which are summarized below.

Significant Unavoidable Effects

Neither the preferred alternative nor any other alternative would result in a significant impact that could not be mitigated to a less-than-significant level.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

The proposed project would result in the irretrievable commitment of fossil fuels and other energy sources needed to build, operate, and maintain the wetlands. The restoration of the site to wetlands, however, is not considered an irreversible commitment because the landscape could once again be converted to other land uses in the future, even after restoration; in other words, the project does not involve converting the land to urban land uses, which tend to be irreversible.

Relationship between Short-Term Uses of the Environment and the Maintenance and Enhancement of Long-Term Productivity

Short-term uses of the environment that would occur with restoration include the impacts on existing wetlands and habitat. However, in the long term, the site is expected to be substantially more productive for habitat and fish and wildlife values.

Selection of the Preferred Alternative

The Coastal Conservancy and the Corps have selected Alternative 5, Restoration of Wetlands in the HAAF and SLC Parcels Using Dredged Material, as the preferred

alternative. This alternative was selected because it would best meet all the project objectives of:

- ◆ creating a wetland restoration project that emphasizes simplicity and has little need for active management;
- ◆ using dredged material in a beneficial manner;
- ◆ recognizing existing site opportunities and constraints and incorporating them into site design;
- ◆ providing for no net loss of wetland habitat functions currently provided at the HAAF site;
- ◆ creating and maintaining wetland habitats that sustain viable fish and wildlife populations, particularly for Bay Area special-status species;
- ◆ providing buffer areas so that wildlife would not be adversely affected by adjacent land uses;
- ◆ ensuring compatibility of fish and wildlife habitats and adjacent land uses; and
- ◆ providing for public access compatible with protection of resource values.

The following provides a comparative discussion of how the restoration project alternatives would meet the project objectives and why Alternative 5 would best meet these objectives.

Management Considerations

Alternatives 2 and 4 would include a cross panhandle levee with gated culverts to protect upland areas from inundation. A cross panhandle levee would not be needed under Alternative 3 or 5 because raising the surface elevation of the panhandle area would protect the area from tidal inundation. Because a cross panhandle levee and gated culverts would need to be periodically inspected and possibly maintained and repaired, management costs would be greater under Alternative 2 or 4 than under Alternative 3 or 5.

Beneficial Use of Dredged Material

Alternative 5 would use the greatest amount of dredged material of the four alternatives. Restoration of wetlands under Alternatives 2 and 4 is based on the process of natural sedimentation and would not require the use dredged material. Both Alternatives 3 and 5 would be created through the use of dredged material. Alternative 5 would allow the greatest use of dredged material because it is approximately 280 acres larger than Alternative 3.

This larger acreage would allow up to ~~8.4~~ 10.6 million cubic yards of dredged material to be placed on Alternative 5 compared to ~~7.5~~ 7.1 million cubic yards of material placed under Alternative 3.

Site Opportunities and Constraints

Site opportunities and constraints were recognized in the site design for all alternatives.

No Net Loss of Habitat Functions

Because all alternatives would result in the restoration of wetlands and associated habitat functions, no net loss of habitat functions would occur under Alternative 2, 3, 4, or 5.

Creation and Maintenance of Wetland Habitats

Alternatives 4 and 5 would provide the greatest acreage of wetland habitat types of the four alternatives because of the addition of the 280-acre SLC parcel. Although Alternative 4 would provide a slightly greater diversity in habitat types (perennial hypersaline ponds and perennial brackish ponds), Alternative 5 would include a substantial acreage of tidal pannes, not a component of Alternative 4. Habitat types created under both alternatives are subtidal channel/open water, intertidal channel/mudflat, coastal salt marsh, tidal ponds, seasonal wetlands/ponds, perennial emergent marsh, and grassland.

An important advantage of Alternative 5 over Alternative 4 is that it requires less time before the habitat types would be created and associated benefits to wildlife would begin to occur. Figures 3-5a, 3-5b, and 3-5c graphically depict these changes. The largest habitat type, coastal salt marsh, would develop more quickly under Alternative 5 than under ~~any of the other alternatives~~ Alternatives 2 and 4. In addition, the largest acreage of habitat important for special-status species would ~~restore~~ be restored faster under Alternative 5 than under Alternative 2, 3, or 4.

Buffers between Wildlife and Adjacent Land Uses

Alternatives 2, 3, and 4, and 5 do not provide equal buffers between the restored wetlands and adjacent land uses. Alternatives 3 and 5 provide buffers and wildlife corridors along the New Hamilton Partnership levee.

Compatibility with Adjacent Land Uses and Wildlife Habitats

Land uses adjacent to the wetland restoration site include residential development, open space, and agricultural land. As indicated in this EIR/EIS, all alternatives would be considered compatible with existing land uses. Alternatives 4 and 5 would enhance compatibility because the NSD dechlorination plant would be moved off the restoration site.

Public Access Compatible with Protection of Resource Values

Public access to the wetland restoration site would be the same under all alternatives. Generally, this access would be limited to the western edge of the restoration site. All alternatives would protect the resource values created as a result of wetland restoration.

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List of Acronyms

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- San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) (S-1)
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) (S-1)
- Hamilton Army Airfield (HAAF) (S-1)
- California State Lands Commission (SLC) (S-1)
- Defense Base Closure and Realignment Act of 1988 (BRAC) (S-1)
- environmental impact report/environmental impact statement (EIR/EIS) (S-1)

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