

City of Brisbane

Agenda Report

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council via the City Manager

FROM: Interim Community Development Director

SUBJECT: Support for Designation of San Francisco Bay Estuary as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance

DATE: Meeting of April 5, 2010

City Council Goals:

To develop plans and pursue opportunities to protect natural resources (Goal #8).

Purpose:

To consider a request by Audubon Society California to support the designation of San Francisco Bay Estuary as a Ramsar Wetland of International Significance.

Recommendation:

That the City Council authorize the City Manager to sign the attached letter supporting the designation of San Francisco Bay Estuary as a RAMSAR Wetland of International Significance.

Background:

During the public comment period of the March 15, 2010 City Council meeting a request was made for the City Council to support the above-referenced designation. The City Council directed staff to review this request and schedule it for the meeting of April 5, 2010.

Information from the Audubon Society indicates that *The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat*, informally known as “Ramsar” is an intergovernmental wetland conservation treaty adopted in 1971 in Ramsar, Iran. The Ramsar treaty promotes wetland biodiversity, ecosystem services, and wise use of wetlands through voluntary measures. “Ramsar Wetlands of International Significance” benefit from increased conservation status and recognition, are part of an international conservation network that encompasses flyways and other migratory routes, and can be eligible for increased funding – directly through grants in developing nations,

and indirectly through increased tourism, fishing, and recreation. This designation is not regulatory and does not impose a financial obligation on the City.

There are nine criteria for qualifying as a Wetland of International Significance, pertaining to the site's importance in terms of supporting waterfowl and shorebirds, indigenous fish, endangered species and/or threatened ecological communities. The criteria and Audubon's analysis of how the entire San Francisco Bay estuary meets these criteria is attached.

Discussion:

Audubon's application applies only to publicly-owned and/or managed conservation lands within the entire San Francisco Bay Estuary, which extends from the South Bay to the Delta. The estuary as defined for purposes of the application includes not only the open water of the bay but related areas that historically were affected by tidal action, such as tidal marshes, mud flats, and lagoons. While the estuary as defined by the application encompasses approximately 1,600 square miles, the designation request is limited to those properties which are either publicly owned and/or managed for conservation purposes (see Exhibit). According to Audubon, private landowners could opt in at a later time.

A map has been attached which shows the estuary limits as identified in the application, as well as the portion which lies within Brisbane. The Brisbane segment encompasses open water, the lagoon, historically tidally influenced areas of the City (now filled) generally easterly of Bayshore Boulevard, and filled areas westerly of Bayshore such as the entrances to downtown and Crocker Park. As noted above, the proposed application addresses only to publicly-owned and/or managed lands for conservation purposes. Lands within Brisbane that would qualify include properties within and along the east edge of the lagoon. While there are other filled City-owned properties such as the fire station, community park and city hall within the estuary limits, these are not managed for conservation purposes and therefore would not be appropriate to include within the application. The attached letter of support makes this distinction clear.

In summary, sStaff supports the requested designation. The City and region have a long history of working to protect the Bay. Formal recognition of the significance of this feature and funding opportunities that might subsequently arise due to designation are positive steps in protecting and enhancing San Francisco Bay. As noted previously, this designation does not apply to private property, carries no regulatory authority and does not impose any obligation on the part of the City.

Fiscal Impact:

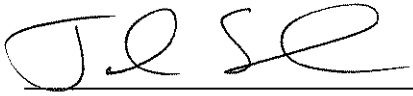
None.

Measures of Success:

The intent of the Ramsar designation is to raise awareness of the significance of San Francisco Bay as an ecological resource, and attract funding for Bay conservation and restoration.

Attachments:

Draft Letter of Support
Audubon Society Background Materials

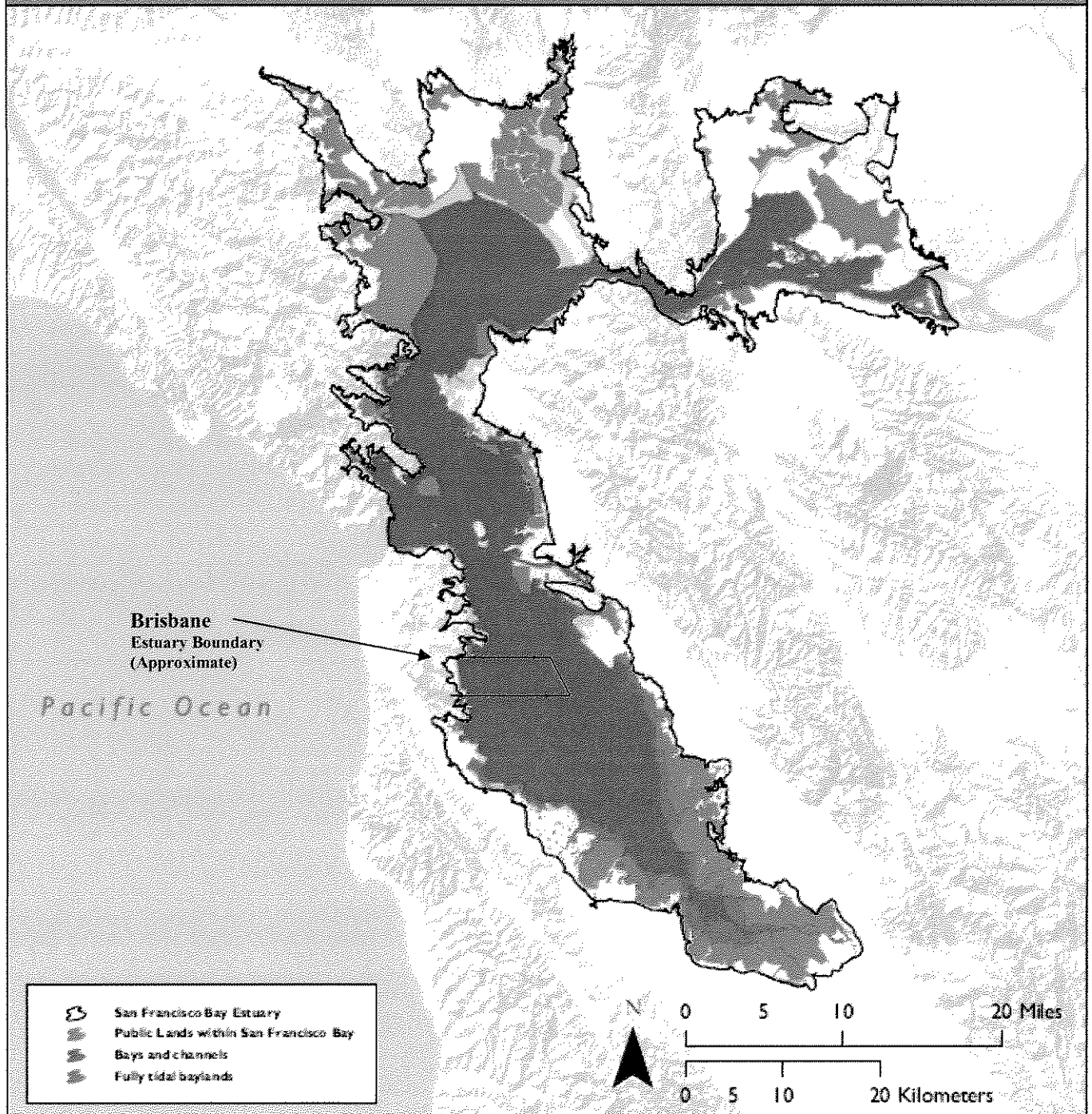


Department Head



City Manager

Public Conservation Lands of San Francisco Bay Estuary



Map Produced: October 20, 2009
Projection and Datum: California Teale Albers NAD83

Public land cover info from:
Bay Area Protected Areas Database, 2008.
Available at <http://www.openspacecouncil.org/programs/index.php?program=6>



 **Audubon** CALIFORNIA

San Francisco Bay and Baylands layer from:
San Francisco Bay EcoAtlas, 2002. San Francisco Estuary Institute.

Ramsar Criteria	How San Francisco Bay Meets the Criteria
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1. Contains a representative, rare, or unique example of a natural or near-natural wetland type found within the appropriate biogeographic region.	Accounts for 77% of California's remaining perennial estuarine habitat.
2. Supports vulnerable or endangered species or threatened ecological communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 animals and 5 plants listed as threatened or endangered by USA and/or California. • +85 endangered or restricted range species (California Natural Diversity Database).
3. Supports populations of plant and/or animal species important for maintaining the biological diversity of a particular biogeographic region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 endemic taxa in San Francisco Bay Estuary (8 animal, 2 plant) • + Additional near-endemic or range-limited taxa.
4. Supports plant and/or animal species at a critical stage in their life cycles, or provides refuge during adverse conditions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shorebird and waterfowl wintering ground. • Fish spawning, rearing, and migratory habitat. • Important for approximately 500 aquatic invertebrate species.
5. Regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds. (shorebirds)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosts more wintering and migrating shorebirds than any other estuary along the U.S. Pacific Coast south of Alaska. • Western Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network Site of Hemispheric Importance. • 340,000+ was average shorebird count in November surveys 2006-2008. • 589,000-932,000 shorebirds counted in spring surveys 1988-1993.
5. Regularly supports 20,000 or more waterbirds. (waterfowl)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • North American Waterfowl Conservation Plan Area of Continental Significance. • >50% of Pacific Flyway wintering diving ducks, including 49% of the scaup population and 43% percent lower Pacific Flyway scoters. • SF Bay averaged 182,818 waterfowl in January counts 1992-2007 (exclusive of 1996). Average of 99,649 birds counted in Suisun from 2006-2009. • Seasonal hotspots where over 20,000 waterbirds regularly congregate such as San Pablo Bay and San Leandro.
6. Regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of waterbird.	True of at least 23 species: Double-crested Cormorant, Northern Shoveler, Canvasback, Scaup (Greater and Lesser combined), Surf Scoter, Ruddy Duck, California Black Rail, California Clapper Rail, Black-necked Stilt, American Avocet, Black-bellied Plover, Semipalmated Plover, Dowitcher (Long and Short Billed combined), Marbled Godwit, Whimbrel, Long-billed Curlew, Willet, Western Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Dunlin, California Gull, Least Tern, and Forster's Tern.
7. Supports a significant proportion of indigenous fish subspecies, species or families, life-history stages, species interactions and/or populations that are representative of wetland benefits and/or values and thereby contributes to global biological diversity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 taxa endemic to the Bay and nearby waters: Delta smelt, San Francisco topsmelt, and Tule perch. • Four local races of Chinook salmon.
8. Provides an important source of food for fishes, spawning ground, nursery and/or migration path on which fish stocks, either within the wetland or elsewhere, depend.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • >130 species of resident and migratory marine, estuarine, and anadromous fish species • Spawning and nursery habitat for marine species. • Estuarine species reside in the Bay throughout their life cycle. • Critical migratory pathway between foraging areas in the Pacific Ocean and spawning grounds upstream in the Bay's tributary rivers for anadromous Chinook salmon, steelhead, and sturgeon. • Essential Fish Habitat for various fish species life stages managed under three Fisheries Management Plans of the National Marine Fisheries Service. • Habitat Areas of Particular Concern for various fish species within the Pacific Groundfish Fisheries Management Plan.
9. Regularly supports 1% of the individuals in a population of one species or subspecies of wetland-dependent non-avian animal species	True of Salt marsh harvest mouse, Salt marsh wandering shrew, Suisun shrew, and San Francisco garter snake

Draft

April 6, 2010

Acting Director, Rowan Gould
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Division of International Conservation
4401 N. Fairfax Dr., Room 100
Arlington, VA 22203

Re: Support San Francisco Bay Estuary nomination as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance

Dear Director Gould:

The City of Brisbane strongly supports the nomination of San Francisco Bay Estuary as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance.

San Francisco Bay is widely recognized as one of North America's most ecologically important estuaries. The largest estuary on the West Coast of the United States, San Francisco Bay, accounts for 77% of California's remaining perennial estuarine wetlands, which provide key habitat for a broad suite of species and a range of ecological services such as flood protection, water quality maintenance, nutrient filtration and cycling, carbon sequestration, and flora and fauna habitat. San Francisco Bay is home to many plant species and over 1,000 species of animals, including endemic and conservation status species.

San Francisco Bay's ecological importance has garnered national and international conservation designations including: Site of Hemispheric Importance by the Western Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network, Area of Continental Significance for waterfowl by the North American Waterfowl Conservation Plan, Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society, and Essential Fish Habitat by the National Marine Fisheries Service.

The ecological importance of San Francisco Bay makes it an exemplary candidate for inclusion on the list of Ramsar Wetland of International Importance. San Francisco Bay handily qualifies for this distinction by meeting and/or exceeding all nine of the Ramsar Wetland of International Importance criteria on multiple counts.

Please note that the City supports the designation of all City-owned lands within the Estuary limits which are managed for conservation purposes. This primarily involve properties within and adjacent to Brisbane Lagoon. More specific information regarding these parcels is available upon request.

Sincerely,

Clayton L. Holstine
City Manager
City of Brisbane