



# PICKLEWEED POST

Friends of San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge Newsletter

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## Message from the Marsh

It's time to celebrate! Thirty years ago the conservation community protested the proposed development of 4,500 housing units on Cullinan Ranch. Twenty years ago Cullinan Ranch was added to San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Soon the tides will return and the marsh grasses thrive. Come, join us — the north bay needs all of us working together.

- Francesca Demgen, President, Friends of San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge

## Wetlands Restoration Project Begins



Those of you driving highway 37 over the last few months may have noticed some earthmoving equipment working just north of the west bound lane. This work signals the beginning of the long awaited tidal wetland restoration of the 1,500 acre Cullinan Ranch unit (Cullinan) of the San Pablo Bay NWR. Cullinan was an agricultural property destined to become a housing development when several locals, including the Friends' own Fran Demgen, championed the cause to defeat the project. Thanks to their efforts the Refuge was able to acquire the property in 1991 under the Endangered Species Act. The intent was to restore the land to tidal wetland habitat in

Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse



support of endangered species such as the Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse (think Salty) and the California clapper rail. It's been years of planning, permitting and fund raising, but finally the Fish & Wildlife Service, partnered with their neighbors the California Department of Fish and Game and with the help of Ducks Unlimited, has begun construction.

The earthmoving this last fall was the first phase of constructing a levee designed to protect a vulnerable section of Highway 37 from tidal inundation. Other upcoming activities include armoring approximately two

Clapper Rail



and a half miles of the highway to prevent erosion, the construction of a deceleration and acceleration lane to facilitate public access and the construction of public use facilities such as a fishing pier, kayak launch ramps and gravel trail. The restoration is targeted for completion winter of 2012. For more information visit [www.restorecullinan.info](http://www.restorecullinan.info) or contact the refuge.

- Steven Carroll, P.E., Ducks Unlimited, Inc.

From Skaggs to riches . . .  
in wildlife and their habitats



Native peoples in and around San Pablo Bay saw a bay much different than what we see today. Likewise, so did the early European explorers viewing the north end of San Francisco Bay. From what is now Cougar Mountain, at the junction of State Routes 37 and 121, or a crow's-nest on Spanish galleon, the view would have been a huge estuary extending from Cougar Mountain east to beyond the Napa River. Tidal slough channels or all shapes, lengths, and depths would have coursed about the saltmarsh habitat where sea and fresh water meet – an estuary. Composition and abundance of species would have ranged from mosquitos to eagles, and from crustaceans to fishes. Estuaries are incredibly rich, fertile, and productive ecosystems. We'd all like to take a trip back in time to see what the early people saw! I guess they forgot their cameras.

Back in the late 1800's and early 1900's, the wider and deeper slough channels were used to create dykes and levees around portions of the vast estuaries of the north bay. These portions of estuary were drained of water forming dry islands surrounded by slough channels. These islands were then farmed for hay to feed dairy and beef cattle, and horses drawing carts, buggies, and wagons. One of these islands was owned by M.B. Skaggs who farmed 4,390-acres. Mr. Skaggs was also a supermarket and pharmacy mogul who started up chains that exist to this day. Remember Skaggs Pharmacy?

The U.S. Navy purchased 3,310-acres of land from the Skaggs family to create a communications and listening post simply known as Skaggs Island. From the winter of 1941 to 1993, Skaggs Island was a Naval facility complete with a small town of 250-400 people, a K through 6<sup>th</sup> school, tennis courts, movie theater, gymnasium, convenience store, ball diamond, and single family and barracks housing. A self-contained community that supported military cloak 'n dagger activities. More cloak than dagger.

Upon closure of the Skaggs Island Naval facility, efforts to convey the Naval portion of the island to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) were put in motion. Other uses were considered, however, the idea to convert the former Naval facility to a Unit of the Services San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) received better traction. On March 31, 2011, signatures were put to paper documenting the transfer of Skaggs Island to San Pablo Bay NWR. Now what?

With all 140 buildings and other Naval structures completely gone, the Skaggs Island Unit of San Pablo Bay NWR holds tremendous possibilities for wildlife conservation. For decades the island was farmed, even while as a spook center for the military. Today, deer, birds of prey, coyote, egrets, herons, and assorted other wildlife use the various grasslands, shrub stands, ephemeral pools, old drainage channels, and non-native eucalyptus trees as habitat. The island was formerly an estuarine system, and the extent the clock can be turned back to that time may not be the best provision for wildlife of the San Francisco Bay area in this day. Indeed, surrounding lands have other uses, and perhaps the Skaggs Island Unit can be shaped to provide assorted habitats supporting a rich array of wildlife and their habitats. In the coming months, San Pablo Bay NWR will explore the numerous possibilities of providing, maintaining, and showcasing what Skaggs Island can become for wildlife and their habitats. - Don Brubaker, Refuge Manager

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**

- 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 \$\_\_\_\_\_

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**Thank You!**  
**Your membership contribution  
is tax deductible.**