

San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority (Authority) Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Authority?

The San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority (Authority) is a new regional government agency charged with raising and allocating resources for the restoration, enhancement, protection, and enjoyment of wetlands and wildlife habitat in the San Francisco Bay and along its shoreline. The Authority was created by the California legislature in 2008 with the enactment of AB 2954 (Lieber).

The Authority is governed by a board of seven members appointed by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), the list of board members can be viewed at: <http://www.sfbayrestore.org/board.html>. The Board will explore, promote and coordinate local and regional public revenue mechanisms to help fund the restoration of wetlands on more than 36,000 shoreline acres already in public ownership. The Board will also develop priorities and sequencing for allocating any funds received to wildlife habitat restoration, related public access, recreation, and flood management projects. The legislation requires priority be given to projects that meet the selection criteria of the State Coastal Conservancy's San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program (see <http://www.scc.ca.gov/index.php?cat=18>) and are consistent with the Bay Conservation and Development Commission's (BCDC) coastal management plan (see <http://www.bcdc.ca.gov/planning/planning.shtml>) and the San Francisco Joint Venture's implementation strategy (see <http://www.sfbayjv.org/strategy.php>).

According to *Greening the Bay: Financing Wetland Restoration in San Francisco Bay* (Save The Bay, August 2007, www.savesfbay.org/greeningthebay), restoring 36,000 acres is estimated to cost up to \$1.43 billion over 50 years. Some \$370 million is already invested in acquiring property and planning these restoration projects. This funding has come from state bonds and occasional federal appropriations. The Authority adds to those resources, bringing regional funding to bear on this important regional priority.

2. Why do we need a special district to restore the Bay?

The Bay is a natural treasure that defines our region, provides recreation and beauty, moderates our climate and generates millions of dollars in economic benefits.

- Today, only five percent of the Bay's original wetlands remain, and the Bay is threatened every day by pollution and sprawl.
- Scientists advise that a healthy, sustainable Bay requires at least 100,000 acres of tidal wetlands. In 1999, there were only about 40,000 acres of tidal wetlands remaining around the Bay. Today, over 36,000 acres of restorable Bay shoreline is in public ownership and planned for restoration to tidal wetlands. The ambitious 100,000 acre goal is in sight.
- Restoring 36,000 acres is estimated to cost up to \$1.43 billion over 50 years. By making this investment – equivalent to \$4 annually for each Bay Area

resident – we can establish thousands of acres of thriving wetlands on the shoreline and reverse more than a century of degradation that reduced the size of the Bay by one-third.

No existing agency combines the Authority's restoration mission, Bay-region-wide focus, and financing authority. BCDC, for example, is a regulatory agency, and would be permitting the same projects for which it would be issuing grants. Furthermore, BCDC's jurisdiction is limited to 100-foot band from the shoreline.

Locally-generated public revenues can serve as leverage to qualify restoration projects for matching dollars from state and federal sources.

3. How will the Authority raise funds?

The Authority may levy benefit assessments and special taxes, apply for and receive grants from federal and state agencies, solicit and accept gifts, fees, grants, and allocations from public and private entities, issue revenue bonds, incur bond indebtedness, and enter into joint powers agreements.

Any benefit assessment or special taxes proposed by the Authority would involve a public vote of the affected property owners, consistent with Proposition 218 and other statutes. The Authority would identify the appropriate affected area for any assessment(s) – which could be as large as the entire nine-county Bay Area or as small as appropriate under the circumstances. Typical assessments in other open space districts have ranged from \$20-\$80 per year per property.

4. What is expected of a Governing Board member?

The Governing Board will explore, promote and coordinate local and regional public revenue mechanisms to help fund the restoration of wetlands on more than 36,000 shoreline acres already in public ownership. The Governing Board may also apply for grants, fees, and allocations from public and private entities, issue revenue bonds, and receive donations. The Governing Board will develop priorities and sequencing for allocating any funds received to wildlife habitat restoration, related public access, recreation, and flood management, following the existing selection criteria of the State Coastal Conservancy's San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.

Governing Board members will be reviewing and selecting appropriate revenue mechanisms that may require voter approval. Governing Board members will be expected to be prepared to actively support these measures.

Governing Board meetings will be convened quarterly.

Governing Board members should ideally bring knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, issues related to the restoration of San Francisco Bay and of environmental/open space protection. Experience with policy and legal aspects of implementing revenue

mechanisms would also be directly relevant. For members who represent subregions, experience working collaboratively with other elected officials and jurisdictions within the subregion is desirable.

Board members are subject to the Fair Political Practices Act and members will need to file a Form 700 upon assuming office, annually and upon leaving office. The scope of the filing will be the San Francisco Bay Region.

The legislation permits the payment to Board members of a *per diem* set at \$100 per meeting but there is currently no funding for this item. ABAG is exploring funding sources.

5. Is there a list of projects eligible for funding?

The Authority's enabling legislation specifies that eligible projects must restore, protect or enhance tidal wetlands, managed ponds or natural habitats on the San Francisco Bay shoreline, preferably in conjunction with flood management features and/or public access improvements where appropriate. Priority will be given to projects that are consistent with the selection criteria of the State Coastal Conservancy's San Francisco Bay Area program, the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission's coastal management program, and the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture's implementation strategy. In selecting projects, the Authority will solicit input from its advisory committee, and will adopt a procedure for evaluating proposals.

The list below is the one that was before the legislature when it enacted AB 2954 (map added). It represents a substantial starting point for the Authority to feed into its project selection procedure when the time comes.

6. Why are wetlands important?

Wetlands are the lungs of the Bay, giving life to hundreds of fish and wildlife species that depend on them for survival and billions of small organisms that thrive in Bay mud to form the base of the food chain. In addition to providing vital habitat for fish and wildlife, wetlands provide major benefits to the community:

- Clean water
- Economic benefits
- Helps curb global warming
- Flood and erosion control

Wetlands play a central role in the battle against global warming, and scientists from the United Nations to the White House have identified wetland restoration as a priority strategy in fighting global warming. Scientists have found that tidal salt marshes

capture carbon from greenhouse gases in the air efficiently and effectively, helping to counter global warming. Healthy tidal marshes act as natural flood control by absorbing excess water and may adjust to rising sea levels – building itself higher with sediment inflow as the water level rises and absorbing water that would otherwise require expensive levees or sea walls.

Wetland restoration has also provided an important benefit to Bay-related industry and the regional economy, with “beneficial reuse” of dredged sediment from critical Bay ports playing a role in restoration projects around the Bay.

7. Why should we invest in restoring the Bay if global warming will flood the wetlands?

Threatened sea level rise from global warming is inherently a highly gradual process. Projections are that the Bay Area might see up to a meter increase in sea levels over the next one hundred years. The sooner we can restore these wetlands to tidal action the sooner they can establish themselves, adjusting to rising sea levels with sediment inflow and absorbing water levels which would otherwise have to be held back with expensive flood control mechanisms (levees, sea walls).

In fact, wetlands can play a central role in the battle against global warming; scientists from the UN to the White House have identified wetland restoration as a priority strategy in fighting global warming.