

# Bay Area-wide tax aims to protect against rising sea levels

By Denis Cuff

[dcuff@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:dcuff@bayareanewsgroup.com)

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OAKLAND -- Bay Area voters will be asked in June to approve a \$12 annual parcel tax to protect and restore the San Francisco Bay shoreline and wetlands from rising sea levels due to climate change.

The proposed tax is believed to be the first to go on the ballot in all nine Bay Area counties. It needs two-thirds approval to pass.

In authorizing the measure unanimously on Wednesday, members of the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority said the tax is needed to provide \$500 million over 20 years to fortify levees and create flood relief plains to protect homes, businesses, airports, highways and parks around the bay, and restore wetlands important to fish and wildlife.

## FLOOD RISK

Areas shown in red will face flooding if the bay rises rises 55 inches, which scientists predict will occur by 2100.



"This is a historic day for Bay Area counties to get together on wetlands restoration on a scale not seen before," said Dave Pine, a San Mateo County supervisor who is chairman of the restoration authority board. "San Francisco Bay is a common resource people in our region want to protect. It's part of our identity."

The panel is made up of seven elected county, city and special district officials who oversee a partnership that aims to protect bay wildlife and wetlands.

Board members, environmentalist and business leaders say the tax is needed to guard against the growing risk of flooding from rising sea levels because of climate change.

Scientists predict the sea level to rise 3 to 5 feet through 2100.

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Business groups such as the Bay Area Council and Silicon Valley Leadership Group, and environmental groups such as Save San Francisco Bay, back the measure.

But not everyone is pleased.

Zelda Bronstein, of Berkeley, said big corporations, such as high-tech firms in the flood-vulnerable South Bay, would get a disproportionate large benefit from the tax that would burden all Bay Area property owners for two decades.

"This isn't fair," she said Wednesday, urging the board to look into other financing tools that would make big corporations pay more.

John Gioia, of Richmond, a Contra Costa County supervisor on the restoration authority board, disagreed.

"This is not subsidizing any corporation," he said. "This is improving land under public ownership, making the bay more accessible, and cleaning the bay."

Gioia said \$1 a month per parcel is a modest price to invest to protect San Francisco Bay.

The Bay Area Council, a business coalition, supports the tax. The worst flood expected every 150 years from the combined impact of high tides and four-to-seven consecutive days of rain would cause more than \$10 billion in economic damage to the region, said Adrian Covert, the Bay Area Council's policy director.

Restoration board members also said they expect the tax dollars would provide leverage to secure federal grants.

The Contra Costa Taxpayers Association hasn't yet taken a stand on the measure, but a leader of the group said he is concerned 2016 is going to produce a rush of tax and fee ballot measures.

"We are worried this is going to put a tremendous burden on taxpayers," said Jack Weir, president of the taxpayers association board.

Weir said he believes the restoration tax is on the June ballot because backers want to avoid the November Presidential election ballot expected to be crowded with many other tax and fee measures. With many tax measures on the same ballot, voters are likelier to vote against all of them, he said.

Contact Denis Cuff at 925-943-8267. Follow him at [Twitter.com/deniscuff](https://twitter.com/deniscuff).

