

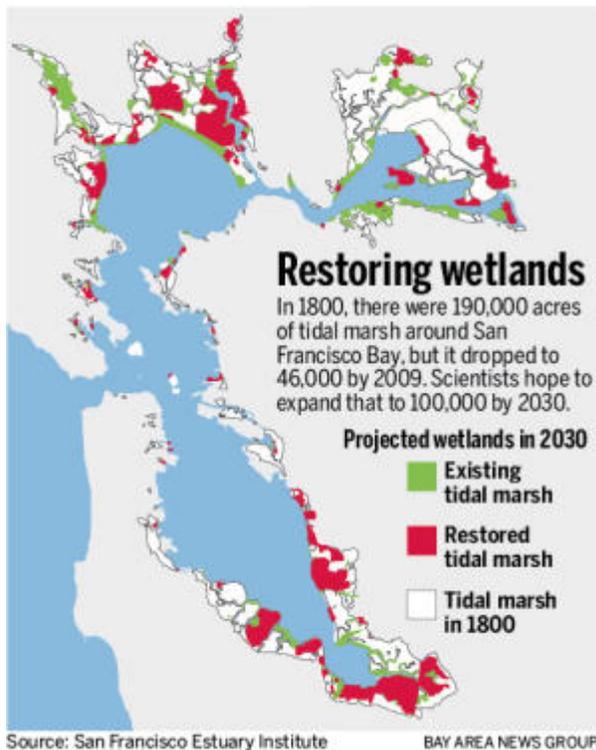
# Contra Costa Times editorial: Bay Area voters should support wetlands restoration tax

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The Facebook campus sits next to the Menlo Park Baylands amid the rich colors of the drying mud flats in Ravenswood Slough in this aerial view taken Wednesday afternoon, Sept. 2, 2015, in Menlo Park, Calif. (Karl Mondon/Bay Area News Group)



We're fortunate that environmentalists three decades ago halted the filling of San Francisco Bay. Now, as we face rising sea levels due to global warming, we need to take the next step by restoring wetlands destroyed over more than a century.

That's why Bay Area voters in June should back Measure AA, a nine-county, \$12-per-parcel annual tax to raise some of the funds needed for restoration before the wetlands are forever lost.

Wetlands provide natural flood protection by breaking up wave energy. Unfortunately, between the 1849 Gold Rush and the 1980s about one-third of the bay was filled. The tidal marsh, once about 200,000 acres, has been reduced to about 44,000 today.

Meanwhile, water level in the bay is expected to rise one foot in the next 20 years, 2 feet by 2050 and up to 5 feet by 2100, according to the National Academy of Sciences.

That threatens highways, airports, homes and office buildings along the shoreline. We should address the problem as soon as possible.

The proposed tax would raise an estimated \$500 million over its 20-year life, a fraction of what is needed, but a good seed-money fund to attract state, federal and private-sector contributions.

It would be administered by the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority, an agency created by state law in 2008 to restore wetlands and wildlife habitat in the bay and along the shoreline.

The agency has a seven-member board appointed by the Association of Bay Area Governments but no funding to carry out its mission. That's where the tax comes in. To be sure, the tax is imperfect. Each parcel would be levied the same \$12 annually, regardless of its size or proximity to the bay. In an ideal world, property owners would pay in proportion to the benefits they receive. But levying such an assessment would be extremely complicated and costly.

The simple tax, which requires two-thirds approval across the nine counties, will be easier for voters to understand. Given the modest amount raised, we're not inclined to press for a more costly allocation system.

That said, there's little doubt that some major companies that have built in low-lying areas, especially Silicon Valley firms like Facebook, Google and Cisco Systems, face substantial threats and stand to benefit greatly from wetlands restoration.

They need to step up with meaningful contributions to the restoration effort. Merely underwriting a political campaign that leaves the cost to others doesn't cut it.

We're happy to urge voter support, but Measure AA should be just the start.