

CALIFORNIA OCEAN
PROTECTION COUNCIL

Staff Recommendation
January 13, 2005

San Francisco Bay Subtidal Habitat Goals Project

Developed By: **Abe G. Doherty**

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Consideration of the San Francisco Bay Subtidal Habitat Goals Project, and possible 1) determination that it is a high priority project, and 2) authorization for the Council's Secretary to take actions needed to provide for development of this project, including expenditure of up to \$125,000 in state funds reserved for ocean protection.

NEAREST OCEAN or COASTAL LOCATION: San Francisco Bay

AGENCIES or ENTITIES RECOMMENDING PROJECT: California Coastal Conservancy, Bay Conservation and Development Commission, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, San Francisco Estuary Project

EXHIBIT

Exhibit 1: Letters of Support

RESOLUTION:

"The Ocean Protection Council finds pursuant to Sections 35600 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code that the San Francisco Bay Subtidal Habitat Goals Project, as herein described, is of high priority for ocean conservation and authorizes the Secretary to take actions necessary for its development, including expenditure of up to \$125,000 of ocean protection funds for the project."

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Conservancy staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council designate as a high priority and authorize the Conservancy to take actions to develop and fund contracts for up to a total of \$125,000 to carry out the San Francisco Bay Subtidal Habitat Goals Project (Subtidal Goals Project). The contracts will be for work necessary to complete the project, including:

- writing;
- wacilitation;

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- data collection and GIS data layer development;
- scientific evaluation and review;
- printing and distribution of materials, including the final Subtidal Habitat Goals report.

The report is scheduled to be released by April 2008. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC), the Coastal Conservancy, the San Francisco Estuary Project and the U.S Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) are coordinating the Subtidal Goals Project, which has significant support from many other federal and state agencies.

The Subtidal Goals Project will establish a comprehensive, long-term management vision for protection, restoration, and appropriate use of the subtidal system in San Francisco Bay. The project will identify challenges and threats to the San Francisco Bay ecosystem and provide a scientific basis to guide protection strategies, restoration and research priorities, and management policies of public resource agencies, as well as decisions regarding preservation, enhancement, modification and use of subtidal habitats.

San Francisco Bay is a dynamic, urban, estuarine environment that provides important habitat for fish, waterfowl and other aquatic organisms and wildlife, and also is a valuable commercial and aesthetic resource. While there is a general understanding of the value of different estuarine habitats and productive zones for plankton or pelagic organisms, there is not a good understanding of many of these features specific to San Francisco Bay. Since San Francisco Bay is the largest estuary on the west coast of the United States, and also one of the most urbanized estuaries in the United States, its physical and biological character is not particularly reflected by other west coast estuaries. Despite the considerable research conducted in the San Francisco Bay, many gaps in knowledge remain concerning the different components of subtidal habitats and their utilization by aquatic species. Government agencies with authority over managing the estuary lack sufficient information on the subtidal habitats of the bay and a focused effort is needed in order to improve management of the bay's resources and development.

There is also a need to provide a coordinated approach to restoration and enhancement projects for the subtidal habitats in San Francisco Bay. Research and planning for restoration of the bay's eelgrass and native oyster habitats is on-going and the Subtidal Goals Project will use this work as the basis for science-based planning to develop an integrated vision of the goals for the amount and location of the various subtidal habitats in the bay.

The objectives of the Subtidal Goals Project are to:

- 1) Identify, document, and describe subtidal habitats and their function, value and inter-intra-relationships within San Francisco Bay.
- 2) Based on ongoing and emerging challenges to the San Francisco Bay ecosystem, develop subtidal habitat goals for management, protection, and

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enhancement based on best available scientific information and with input from scientists, resource managers, local governments, industry, fishermen, environmental organizations, recreational users, the public, and other users of San Francisco Bay.

- 3) Identify, prioritize, and recommend research needs for understanding the subtidal habitats of San Francisco Bay and the current level of impacts to these habitats.
- 4) Identify impact reduction, habitat enhancement, and restoration goals for subtidal habitats in San Francisco Bay and prioritize these opportunities within sub-regions of the estuary.

The Subtidal Goals Project will complement the Wetland Goals Project, which was completed in 1999, and the Upland Goals Project, which is on-going, to develop a comprehensive, long-term management vision for the San Francisco Bay Area. The Wetland Goals Project has been enormously successful in articulating a vision for protection and restoration of the intertidal areas of San Francisco Bay, and has been used by many groups to identify and implement projects to make significant progress towards achieving this vision.

The products of the Subtidal Goals Project will include the following:

- 1) A report on the subtidal habitats in San Francisco Bay summarizing existing information on the historic and current state of subtidal habitats in the estuary. This report will include information regarding distribution, abundance, species associations, impacts to, and restoration efforts for the major subtidal habitats in San Francisco Bay.
- 2) Website accessible products (e.g. maps) that provide available information about subtidal habitats in San Francisco Bay. For example, products may include maps of habitat distribution and abundance, general areas and types of commercial and recreational use, information on restoration activities and opportunities, and/or links to pertinent regulatory information.
- 3) Hardcopy and website accessible Subtidal Goals Project report, outlining recommendations and goals for protection, restoration, and needed research to improve subtidal habitat management in San Francisco Bay.

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PROJECT FINANCING

Possible Funding Sources:

Ocean Protection Council (Environmental License Plate Fund)	
\$125,000	
National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration	\$120,000
San Francisco Estuary Project/EPA	\$ 18,000
Total Project Cost	\$263,000

The source of the \$125,000 in funding from the Ocean Protection Council will be an appropriation to the Coastal Conservancy from the California Environmental License Plate Fund, to implement measures needed for the protection and restoration of ocean resources, working in concert with the Ocean Protection Council. The Environmental License Plate Fund was established under PRC Section 21190 to support projects and programs of state agencies, private research organizations and others, for specified purposes, including protection, enhancement and restoration of fish and wildlife habitat and related water quality. The Subtidal Goals Project is a high priority for receipt of the funds, since it will provide crucial planning for restoration and enhancement of the subtidal habitats in San Francisco Bay, the largest estuary on the West Coast.

CONSISTENCY WITH CALIFORNIA’S OCEAN ACTION STRATEGY: The proposed project is consistent with Action 10 of California’s Ocean Action Strategy, since the Subtidal Habitat Goals Project is a coordinated ecosystem management approach to guide and improve the stewardship of subtidal resources within San Francisco Bay. The project is also consistent with Action 13, since it identifies an issue that may benefit from further coordination from the Ocean Protection Council. Since the Subtidal Goals Project will involve the various agencies working on resource protection and management of the subtidal habitats of San Francisco Bay, coordination by the Ocean Protection Council will help to ensure that the project is completed in a timely manner.

CONSISTENCY WITH OCEAN PROTECTION COUNCIL’S INTERIM PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

Mandatory Criteria

1. Furthers the following statutory purposes and policies of the Ocean Protection Act:

- **Improves management, conservation, and protection of coastal waters and ocean ecosystems:** The Subtidal Goals Project will result in the establishment of a comprehensive, long-term vision and goals for the management, protection, restoration and enhancement of the subtidal habitats in San Francisco Bay, based on best available scientific information.
- **Encourages those activities and uses that are consistent with sustainable, long-term protection and conservation of ocean and coastal resources:** The Subtidal Goals Project will develop a long-term vision for protection, restoration, and appropriate use of the subtidal system in San Francisco Bay.

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- **Improves monitoring, data gathering, and advances in scientific understanding of the ocean and coastal environment:** The project will synthesize existing monitoring and understanding of the subtidal habitats in the bay and will identify research needs for improving understanding and management of the subtidal habitats of the bay.
 - **Improves the health of fish and fosters sustainable fisheries in ocean and coastal waters:** By increasing understanding of the subtidal habitats and identifying management, restoration and enhancement goals, the project will improve the health of the fish in the bay, including that of the Pacific herring fishery.
 - **Helps to integrate and coordinate the state's laws and institutions responsible for protecting and conserving ocean and coastal resources:** The project will bring together the various stakeholders, including the many state resource managing agencies, in order to develop a collaborative vision of the management goals for the subtidal regions.
 - **Helps to coordinate the collection and sharing of scientific data:** The project will result in documents that assimilate the existing data on the subtidal habitats of the bay and identify research needs and priorities. The products of the project will include reports and maps available both on-line and as hard copies.
 - **Benefits or furthers existing state programs or legislative mandates.** The project will directly assist the Coastal Conservancy and the Bay Conservation and Development Commission in achieving their legislative mandates and implementing the state's coastal management program for San Francisco Bay. The project will also benefit other state agencies with responsibilities related to managing the submerged areas of San Francisco Bay, including the Department of Fish and Game, the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board and the State Lands Commission.
2. **Consistent with the purposes of the funding source:** See Project Financing Section above.
 3. **Has demonstrable support from the public:** The project is supported by a wide range of agencies and entities, including BCDC, the Coastal Conservancy, San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board, DFG, NOAA, EPA, San Francisco Estuary Project, San Francisco National Estuary Research Reserve, Save the Bay, and the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture.
 4. **Relates directly to the ocean, coast, associated estuaries, and coastal-draining watersheds:** The project is focused on the subtidal portions of San Francisco Bay.
 5. **Has greater-than-local interest:** Since San Francisco Bay is the largest estuary on the west coast of the United States, and also is one of the most urbanized estuaries in the United States, it is of statewide significance. San Francisco Bay has been designated by the state legislature as a region with unique natural resource and outdoor recreational needs. The geographic extent of the Subtidal Goals Project encompasses nine counties.

Additional Criteria

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- 1. Helps implement the California Ocean and Coastal Information, Research, and Outreach Strategy and other priorities of local, state or federal advisory groups, or scientific or policy reports, adopted by the council:** One of the top five information and research needs identified in the California Ocean and Coastal Information, Research and Outreach Strategy is information and research to protect and restore ocean and coastal organisms, ecosystems and habitats. The Subtidal Goals Project will help to implement the Information, Research and Outreach Strategy by identifying and evaluating the research needs for the subtidal habitats of San Francisco Bay.
- 2. The project would not occur without Council participation:** Without the funding from the Council, the Subtidal Goals Project would not have sufficient funding for implementation of the project.
- 3. The project includes a contribution of funds or services by other entities:** Matching funds for the project have been provided by NOAA and the San Francisco Estuary Project/EPA. In-kind services will be provided by a variety of agencies and entities.
- 4. The project helps with conflict resolution:** The project will balance protection and enhancement of the subtidal habitats with appropriate use of these habitats. Using a science-based, collaborative process, the project will help resolve conflicts over management of the subtidal habitats.
- 5. The project is ready to implement (grantee or contractor will start and finish the project in a timely manner):** The project is ready to commence upon approval by the Council of funding to support one or more contractors to implement the project. The project schedule estimates completion in April 2008.
- 6. The project involves a combination of local, state, or federal agencies or is a public/private partnership:** The Subtidal Habitat Goals Project is a collaborative project involving many agencies. The Administrative Core Group, which is overseeing its implementation, is composed of NOAA, BCDC, the Coastal Conservancy, EPA and the San Francisco Estuary Project.