

STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD  
SAN FRANCISCO BAY REGION

STAFF SUMMARY REPORT (Dyan Whyte)  
MEETING DATE: August 14, 2013

ITEM: **9**

SUBJECT: **Aramburu Island Restoration Project – Status Report**

DISCUSSION: Aramburu Island in Richardson Bay, Marin County, has been transformed from a construction debris disposal site to a 17-acre wildlife refuge! The primary funding for the Aramburu Island Restoration Project was from the Water Board's Cleanup and Abatement Account (\$800,000) and a Supplemental Environmental Project funded by the Sewerage Agency of Southern Marin as was part of a settlement action addressing sewerage spills in Richardson Bay (\$200,000). The Richardson Bay Audubon Center, working as our contractor and grant recipient, designed and constructed the Project in less than three years. The Island is a long narrow spit of land on the western side of Richardson Bay (see attached map for details) and is owned by Marin County and managed by the Marin County Department of Parks and Open Space.

The Project's purposes were to (1) increase the stability of the Island's eroding eastern shoreline, (2) enhance and create aquatic, wetland and terrestrial habitats on the Island to support a range of target species and natural communities, and (3) provide a platform for ecosystem adaptation to sea level rise, allowing for gradual dynamic transitions.

The renovated landscape of Aramburu Island was designed to and has achieved a suite of new habitats emulating historic ecosystem structure in Richardson Bay, including a sand and gravel beach, high tidal marsh gradients, native seasonal wetlands, and lowland grasslands. The Project also addressed erosion along the Island's eastern shoreline with "soft" engineering conducive to shorebird and harbor seal use instead of the traditional rock riprap armoring, like that of the southern end of the Island, which lacks ecological benefits. By using the "soft" engineering approach, the Island will support a gradual transition of estuarine and terrestrial habitats in response to accelerated sea level rise. Slopes, sediments, vegetation, and shoreline structure have been modified to allow gradual beach retreat and transition from lowland grassland and seasonal wetlands to high tidal marsh during estuarine transgression (submergence due to sea-level rise).

Post-construction monitoring results suggest that the birds are pleased with their new accommodations. A large number of birds including American Coots, Black-bellied Plovers, Bufflehead, Greater and Lesser Scaup, Dunlin, Least Sandpipers, Marbled Godwits, Double Crested Cormorants, and Willits all visited last winter.

The shoreline was specifically designed to attract Caspian Terns, and over 50 settled in for mating and roosting this spring. In addition, Audubon biologists are particularly excited about the first occurrence of nesting Killdeer on the Island. We've also received reports that seal have been exploring the newly excavated channel, but none have had the nerve to check out the constructed seal haul out area. We know all this because the Richardson Bay Audubon Center also received funding as part of the Cosco Busan Settlement to continue vegetation enhancement efforts, invasive species removal, wildlife monitoring, and community volunteer work programs at the Island.

We are pleased to report that our role as project manager is now over and we have deemed the Project a success. We encourage interested parties to visit the Richardson Bay Audubon Center to learn more about Aramburu Island and its new inhabitants, view its wildlife from specially-designed viewing stations, and volunteer to work alongside other community members helping with planting, weed control, and monitoring.

ATTACHMENT: Location Map



Aramburu Island is located in Richardson Bay, a subembayment of San Francisco Bay