BRAC Environmental Office
Building 86 Annex
South Runway
Hamilton Army Airfield
Novato, CA 94949

RAB UPDATE

Seeking New Members

Restoration Advisory Board (RAB) members have decided to reopen RAB membership. The main responsibility of a RAB member is to attend bimonthly meetings and share information with community residents. If you are interested in becoming a RAB member, please call Ed Keller (tel: 415-883-6386) to receive an application packet. After the Army BRAC property transfers, the RAB would like to continue meeting to oversee remediation of the North Antenna Field, Landfill 26, and the Coastal Salt Marsh, which could last up to two years.

Forming Technical Review Committee

The RAB formed a subgroup to review technical documents. The first documents that the subgroup is reviewing are the Risk Assessment and the Focused Feasibility Study. Both of the documents are available for public review at the following locations:

Novato Library, 1720 Novato Blvd.
Tel: 415-897-1141

BRAC Field Office, Hamilton Army Airfield
Tel: 415-883-6386

Please call the sites to confirm hours.

Upcoming Meetings

RAB Meetings are held at the Novato Police Department, Training and Meeting Room, 909 Machin Avenue, Novato.

- March 28, 2001, 7 p.m.

For More Information

Ed Keller, BRAC Environmental Coordinator
tel: 415.883.6386
fax: 415.883.1033
e-mail: haafbec@earthlink.net

HAAF Army BRAC Environmental Office
Building 86 Annex
South Runway
Hamilton Army Airfield
Novato, CA 94949
tel: 415.883.6386

Information Repositories

Marin County Public Library, Novato Branch
1720 Novato Boulevard
Novato, CA 94947
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Call for Access

HAAF

ENVIRONMENTAL NEWS

HAMILTON ARMY AIRFIELD

WINTER 2001 - VOL. 6, NO. 1

Kickstarting a Wetland

As you probably already know, the Corps of Engineers and State of California are planning to recreate nearly 1,000 acres of wetland that existed at Hamilton 150 years ago. It sounds simple enough: just open the dike separating Hamilton from the Bay, and let nature take its course. What you may not know is that the Corps of Engineers and State of California plan to give mother nature a little kickstart; one that will reduce the 50-year process of restoration by up to two decades.

continued on page 2

Tidal ponds are areas within the tidal marsh that form from high tide waters. The ponds store water between the tidal periods and therefore provide important habitat for shorebirds and waterfowl during low tide times.

Seasonal wetlands are areas where water will pool after heavy rains or from rising groundwater. Species common to seasonal wetlands include shorebirds, sandpipers, and mallards.

Grasslands are areas that remain above the mean high tide line and consist of mostly grassy vegetation. Species such as ground squirrels, meadowlarks, and hawks are commonly found in grassland areas.

Tidal pannes are transitional habitats between areas that receive different levels of tidal action. Animals species found in tidal pannes vary depending on the tidal period. During high tides the tidal pannes collect water and can become a habitat for shorebirds and waterfowl.

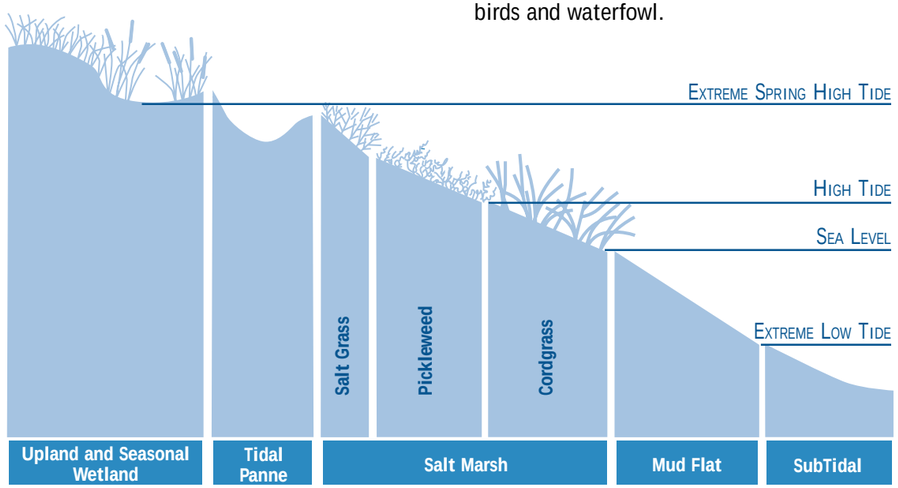


Figure 1 - Wetland Habitats

What is a Wetland?

A wetland is a habitat area located adjacent to water. A wetland can be found next to a stream, a lake, an ocean, or other isolated bodies of water. Wetlands located near the ocean are unique because they are influenced by the tides: the incoming tide flushes the wetland with fresh seawater and the outgoing tide carries sediments back to the sea. Because of this tidal action, some parts of the wetland are always underwater, but the majority of the wetland looks like a mudflat that is inundated only at high tide.

The daily tide pushes through the mudflat, forming a channel with branches that reach out in all directions. The channel is vital to a healthy and mature wetland, because it facilitates the tidal action that ensures a constant influx of new nutrients.

Wetlands are extremely productive ecosystems. They provide habitat for many plant and animal species that rely on them for food, water, and shelter, especially during migration and breeding seasons. At Hamilton, two endangered species-the California clapper rail and the salt marsh harvest mouse-will benefit from the restoration of the salt marsh habitat that formerly dominated the airfield. Of the nearly 1,000 acres to be restored, approximately 690 acres will be salt marsh habitat, considered especially valuable due to its current scarcity in the Bay Area.

The Kickstart

To accelerate the restoration process, the Corps of Engineers and State of California will undertake the following two innovative actions: bringing in millions of tons of mud, and carving out a pilot channel to allow the tides to reach the interior of the wetland more quickly.

Mud / Dredge Material - The current elevation of the Hamilton airfield is approximately 5-7 feet below sea level. The elevation must be raised to the same level as the marsh before a mature wetland can be established. In order to accelerate this process, the Corps of Engineers and State of California plan to import 10.6 million cubic yards (mcy) of dredge material from other locations to bring the level of the wetland in line with the surrounding marsh. If left to nature, this process of sedimentation would require up to 20 years.

One of the sources of dredge material will be the Port of Oakland, which is planning to dredge up to 10-12 mcy from its harbor. Other sources include the Concord Naval Weapons Station (5-7 mcy), and Southhampton Shoal Deepening (2-2.5 mcy). The dredge material will be tested to ensure that it does not include contaminants at levels harmful to wetland species.

Pilot Channel - The Corps of Engineers and State of California also propose to construct a pilot channel to facilitate tidal flushing of the wetland. The location of the pilot channel and the anticipated evolution of the wetland are shown in Figures 2 and 3. The channel is expected to be fully formed within 10 years after the dike is breached.

Long-Term Health

Over the coming decades the wetland will mature as the daily tide introduces a variety of invertebrates and fish to the former airfield. This enriched habitat will in turn attract animals, shorebirds, and waterfowl. Over time the channel will develop branches, allowing a broader area of the wetland become a valuable asset to the Hamilton community.

figure 1
The Wetland After 10 years

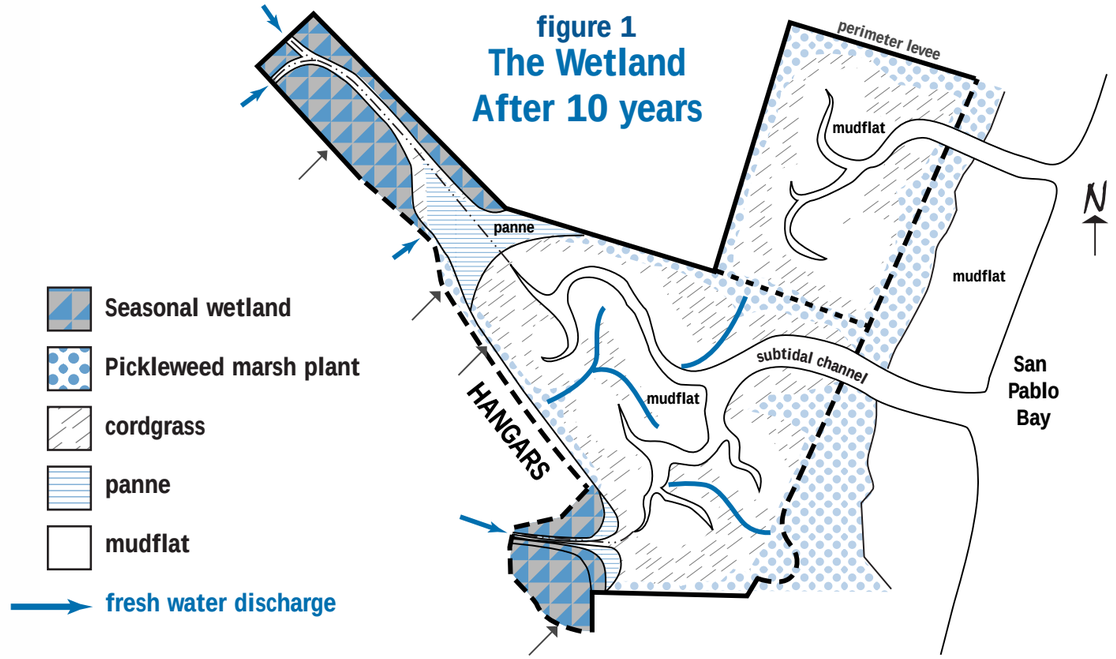
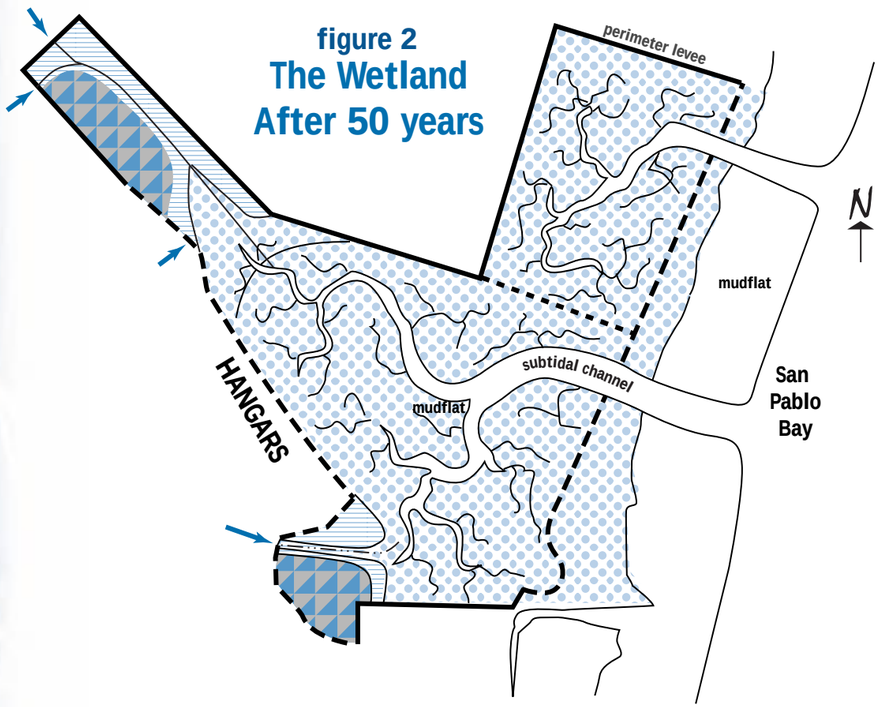


figure 2
The Wetland After 50 years



maps: "Hamilton Army Airfield Westland Restoration Feasibility Study" - prepared by the California State Coastal Conservency

Can the Public help?

The Coastal Conservancy looks forward to providing opportunities for the public to get involved. Because the wetland restoration process is still in its early planning stage, no wetland creation work has started yet. However, once all the documentation is complete and the actual wetland restoration gets underway, we'll let you know how to put your interest into action.

Hamilton Links

Army BRAC Property

Outparcel A-4 The closure report was submitted to the regulators in April. The comments from the regulators were returned in October and the Army is working on resolving them.

POL Hill The closure report was returned with the regulators' comments in June. Most of the comments related to the site's historical information. The Army is researching the sight history and expects to respond to the comments by the end of February 2001.

Hospital Hill The closure report was approved in August. The Army is preparing a joint Finding of Suitability to Transfer (FOST) for POL Hill and Hospital Hill, scheduled for completion in February 2001. Once the closure reports and FOST are approved the parcel can be transferred to the City of Novato for neighborhood commercial reuse.

GSA Sale Area

North Antenna Field The Regulatory Review for the Remedial Investigation is scheduled for completion in March 2001 and the Final Report will be submitted in May 2001. Once the Final Report is reviewed, the USACE will begin the Feasibility Study and Risk Assessment processes.

Landfill 26 The investigation of methane production is continuing. The USACE is installing 15 new gas probes between the landfill and housing development to measure the methane generation and is working with regulatory agencies to decide on the best course of action for the site.

Commercial Areas

The roadwork on Hamilton Parkway and the bypass at the railroad tracks is scheduled for completion by spring of 2001.

The Town Center complex, the amphitheater, ball field and fire house were successfully gifted to the City of Novato from New Hamilton Partnership. The City of Novato is making plans to lease out space for artist studios and a potential coffee shop/cafe in the Town Center.

Renovation of Hangar #5 will be complete by April 2001 and tenant announcements of the commercial space will follow soon after.

Navy BRAC

Documentation of the Gas Station site is underway. The Navy received the draft Remedial Investigation Report back from the regulatory agencies and incorporated all the comments into the Final Remedial Investigation Report. The Navy will proceed with the Water Board Order toward preparation of the Final Corrective Action Plan and the Interim Remedial Action Workplan for the soil, if required.

The Capehart housing has been transferred to the City of Novato, which then transferred it to a developer. The developer will begin demolishing the homes in Spring 2001.

Port of Oakland Dredge Project

October 27, 2000, President Clinton signed the Energy & Water Appropriations Bill. The bill provides $4 million for a construction start for the Port of Oakland dredge project, and $2 million for Hamilton Army Airfield wetlands restoration. The current schedule indicates that construction for the dredge project will start in March 2001.

On October 18, 2000, the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) voted unanimously to approve the Section 401 certification and Waste Discharge Requirements for the Oakland dredge project.

Wetlands Restoration Project

The California Coastal Conservancy (CCC) will purchase the Bel Marin Keys property, and will add it's 1,600 acres to the proposed Hamilton wetlands. Escrow on the purchase closed on January 5, 2001. The CCC will prepare an integrated concept plan for the property and a supplemental Environmental Impact Report and Statement will be completed in the Summer of 2001.