

EMILY RENZEL WETLANDS SITE UPDATE

Background

The Emily Renzel Wetlands is a marsh restoration project sponsored by the City of Palo Alto and the California Coastal Conservancy. The 150-acre site is located in the Palo Alto Baylands between Highway 101 and San Francisco Bay. In addition to restoring a historic salt marsh, the project also involves the creation and maintenance of a freshwater marsh. The project has multiple goals. The restoration was designed to expand and enhance the growth of pickleweed, which is the habitat for the endangered salt marsh harvest mouse. Both marshes also were designed to provide valuable habitat for shore birds and migrating waterfowl that use the Pacific Flyway. The project also exemplifies one of the beneficial uses of reclaimed water, which is used to fill the freshwater marsh. Lastly, the community benefits from the marsh restoration project because wetlands, which once covered much of the Bay Area, are now a rapidly disappearing ecosystem.

Public Involvement

The Emily Renzel Wetlands provides the community with a wonderful arena for bird watching due to the multitude of year-round and seasonal species. In 1993, a volunteer bird census program was developed in order to collect additional data to help evaluate the success of the restoration project. The volunteer program is open to "birders" of all

ages and levels of experience. The only requirements are interest and a commitment to conducting censuses on a regular basis. The census data will also be used to learn which species of birds are using the marsh, how many of each species are present, how use varies with the seasons, and how the birds are using the marsh. The marsh restoration project also provides an excellent opportunity for students to conduct science projects and to learn how to collect data. Currently, there are several classes from Palo Alto High School that are using the marsh to conduct long term studies and, occasionally, other local schools come for class field trips.

Requirements

A monitoring program was developed by the California Regional Water Quality Control Board and the City of Palo Alto for the marsh restoration project. The program has many different components, in order to evaluate and maintain the health of the wetlands. For example, sediment sampling, water quality sampling, water table impact measurements, vegetation studies, and bird censuses are all conducted on a regular basis according to frequencies prescribed in the RWQCP permit.