

FACT SHEET

H.R.6479
SAN FRANCISCO BAY NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE COMPLEX
ESTABLISHMENT ACT
Introduced by Representatives Pete Stark (CA-13), George Miller (CA-7), and
Sam Farr (CA-17)

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What the bill does:

Establishes in statute the San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Complex, to include seven existing National Wildlife Refuges in the San Francisco and Monterey Bay Areas:

- Antioch Dunes
- Don Edwards San Francisco Bay
- Ellicott Slough
- Farallon
- Marin Islands
- Salinas River
- San Pablo Bay

Authorizes “such sums as may be necessary” within the Complex’s seven National Wildlife Refuge units for:

- Development, operations and maintenance
- Recovery and restoration of fish and wildlife habitat
- Acquisition of land

Establishes this Complex of refuges as needing the Department of Interior’s focused attention and increased resources for habitat restoration and other purposes.

Why the bill is needed:

1. San Francisco Bay is the largest estuary on the West Coast and is home to 500 species of wildlife, including 128 threatened or endangered species; the Bay is a crucial resting spot for millions of migrating birds on the Pacific Flyway, and its sheltered waters provide critical nurseries for endangered salmon and other fish. The bay has been designated a site of “Hemispheric Importance” by The Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network, and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan has listed it as one of 34 waterfowl habitats of major concern in North America.

2. Monterey Bay is home to a vital marine sanctuary that protects more than 4,000 square nautical miles of bay and surrounding ocean, including one of the largest underwater canyons in the world. Within or immediately adjacent to the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary are 26 estuarine habitats identified by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and listed in its National Wetlands Inventory. These estuaries support endangered bird and marine mammal species and include Globally Important Bird Areas.
3. Over 150 years, San Francisco Bay has been drastically altered by mass urbanization, and most of its wetlands have been filled to create more land, or diked and drained create agricultural fields and salt ponds, leaving the Bay today one-third smaller than its original size. Although only five percent of the Bay's original wetlands remain intact, they account for 90 percent of California's total remaining tidal wetlands.
4. In 1974, the first congressionally-mandated national wildlife refuge in the country was established in San Francisco Bay, re-named the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge in 1995; it was the nation's first "urban refuge" and remains the largest national wildlife refuge in a metropolitan area. There are seven national wildlife refuges in the region: Antioch Dunes, Don Edwards San Francisco Bay, Ellicott Slough, Farallon, Marin Islands, Salinas River, and San Pablo Bay National Wildlife Refuges, comprising more than 46,000 acres.
5. A wildlife oasis surrounded by intense urban development, this Complex of refuges faces unique challenges within a highly diverse community of more than seven million people. In hosting more than 1.5 million visitors every year, the Complex is also a powerful economic engine for the Bay Area. In 2006, visits to the Don Edwards San Francisco National Wildlife Refuge alone returned \$43.55 for every \$1 in federal budget expenditures.¹ The Complex's urban setting provides unique opportunities to advance the mission of the national wildlife refuge system, including engagement, education and involvement of new constituencies.
6. The Complex has grown significantly in size and complexity with important acquisitions of additional property, and now includes the largest habitat restoration project on the West Coast, the South Bay Salt Pond Project, and large habitat restoration projects under way or planned at Bair Island, East Marin Island, and Cullinan Ranch; at least 13,286 acres of active Bay habitat restoration projects are located on land within the Complex, and thousands more acres of restorable lands are potentially available for addition to the Complex within the next few years.

¹ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2008 report, *Banking on Nature: The Economic Benefits to Local Communities of National Wildlife Refuge Visitation*

7. The increased size and operational requirements of the Complex have not been accompanied by a comparable increase in budget or staff. Staff are now responsible for the operations and maintenance of 70 miles of levees, water control management structures, evaluation and monitoring required by regulatory agencies, and additional outreach, security and environmental education duties.
8. The Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge, the largest unit within the Complex, was identified in 2004 as one of the nation's ten most threatened national wildlife refuges, the Defenders of Wildlife report, *Refuges at Risk*, which warned that without significant funding to protect and restore the refuge and surrounding lands, planned restoration projects will languish, and increased urbanization and growth will threaten the Refuge and the endangered wildlife it protects.
9. Existing and restorable Bay wetlands within the Complex constitute vital habitat for hundreds of fish and wildlife species that need them to survive, including billions of small organisms that thrive in Bay mud to form the base of the food chain. Those wetlands also absorb and filter out many pollutants found in runoff, such as pesticides and fertilizers from farms and gardens, and motor oil from cars. Restored wetlands within the complex can provide cost-effective shoreline protection, and significant flood control and dredging cost savings per acre compared to engineered dams, reservoirs and channels.
10. Existing and potential wetlands within the Complex can provide significant benefit to counter global warming and the prospect of sea-level rise; the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has determined that because wetlands are inherently highly productive and accumulate large below-ground stocks of organic carbon, restoring wetlands and protecting those that remain represents an immediate and large opportunity for enhancing terrestrial carbon sequestration.
11. The Complex and its expansion have already demonstrated innovative public-private partnerships and collaborative conservation approaches, including the contribution of \$35 million from private charitable institutions toward the acquisition on salt ponds to expand the Complex and to support initial planning and management of their restoration; the Complex is well positioned to replicate this kind of partnership and innovate further in this area.
12. The Complex represents a unique national asset within the wildlife refuge system and should be a focal point for cutting edge research, science, and practice in habitat management and restoration, including projects in the areas of:
 - (a) implementation of recovery plans for endangered and threatened wildlife species, and habitat conservation plans for tidal marsh and other priority ecosystems

- (b) integrated ecosystem management and adaptive approaches to planning and implementation of landscape-scale ecosystem restoration
- (c) carbon sequestration and natural shoreline protection benefits of tidal marsh restoration in the face of rising sea levels
- (d) monitoring the health of key species and the value of habitat
- (e) removal and control of invasive species
- (f) public education and community stewardship opportunities in furtherance of the mission of the federal refuge system
- (g) public-private partnerships and collaborative conservation
- (h) establishing and documenting best practices and disseminating and replicating them throughout the federal refuge system