

Scientist Consensus Statement
Supporting the Protection and Restoration of Newark Baylands (“Area 4”),
a Unique San Francisco Bay Wetland
August 4, 2023

We, the undersigned Bay Area scientists, scholars, researchers and experts in wildlife, ecosystems and climate resilience, find that the San Francisco Bay shoreline area referred to as “Area 4,” the former location of the Whistling Wings and Pintail Duck Clubs, located at the head of Mowry Slough within the City of Newark, Alameda County, has unique ecological value and significant importance for the protection and recovery of San Francisco Bay wildlife species, as well as advancing the resilience of San Francisco Bay’s ecosystem and buffering built communities from sea-level rise.

The region’s scientific community has spent thousands of hours carefully studying and analyzing the needs of the San Francisco Bay ecosystem and their studies have consistently highlighted the unique and significant value of protecting and restoring the Newark Area 4 baylands. The conservation and restoration of these lands has been recommended in numerous regional studies due to their potential to support the recovery of San Francisco Bay wetlands and endangered wildlife species, provide space for wetlands to migrate upland as sea levels rise, enhance connectivity of the Don Edwards SF Bay National Wildlife Refuge, provide long-term flood protection to the cities of Newark and Fremont and enhance flood water retention for the region as sea levels rise.

Below are some excerpts from these reports and their specific references to Area 4:

- The Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals Project’s *Baylands Goals Climate Change Update (2015)*¹ – Area Q: “Protect and enhance the tidal marsh-upland transition zone at the upper end of Mowry, Newark, Plummer, and Albrae Sloughs and in the area of the former Pintail Duck Club.”
- The *San Francisco Bay Shoreline Adaptation Atlas (2019)*² – Mowry Operational Landscape Unit (OLU) – The baylands in this OLU are described as providing “a rare buffer between the Bay and developed communities.” The document also recommends “if restoration opportunities become available they can be used to increase the climate resilience of both ecosystems and those developed communities.” The Opportunities

¹ Goals Project. 2015. The Baylands and Climate Change: What We Can Do. Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals Science Update 2015 prepared by the San Francisco Bay Area Wetlands Ecosystem Goals Project. California State Coastal Conservancy, Oakland, CA.

² SFEI and SPUR. 2019. San Francisco Bay Shoreline Adaptation Atlas: Working with Nature to Plan for Sea Level Rise Using Operational Landscape Units. Publication #915, San Francisco Estuary Institute, Richmond, CA. Version 1.0 (April 2019)

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Map depicts Newark Area 4 baylands as having conditions suitable for tidal marsh and migration space.

- The *USFWS Recovery Plan for Tidal Marsh Ecosystems of Northern and Central California* (2013)³ – Map Segment Q depicts the entirety of Area 4 as being suitable for future ecotone restoration.
- The *Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan* (2012)⁴ – Acquisition of Area 4 is identified as a priority due to its ability to support endangered species recovery, to mitigate habitat loss from sea-level rise and climate change, and to create connectivity and corridors to Refuge lands.

Further, studies on sea-level rise adaptation for San Francisco Bay continue to support the unique importance of Newark Area 4 to provide not just marsh migration space, but valuable flood accommodation space (particularly rare in the highly-urbanized South Bay), that can provide flood protection both for the cities of Newark and Fremont and potentially additional shoreline communities around San Francisco Bay. In a May 2021 study by the Stanford Natural Capital Project⁵, Dr. Michelle Hummel and her colleagues indicated that allowing for the Mowry Operational Landscape Unit, including Newark Area 4, to flood under both low and high-level sea-level rise scenarios, could minimize flooding in numerous other areas of the Bay. In referring to the Mowry Operational Landscape Unit, the authors of the study noted that “strategic flooding in these areas could provide substantial regional benefits.”

Beyond the benefits to San Francisco Bay and surrounding communities from restoring Area 4 to promote nature-based resilience to sea-level rise, the Newark Area 4 baylands provide valuable existing wildlife habitat that is worthy of protection. Newark Area 4’s biological features include:

- Approximately 250 acres of existing wetlands and open waters such as seasonal wetlands, diked salt marsh, muted tidal marsh, brackish and freshwater marsh, and perennial aquatic habitat fed by seeps, in addition to adjacent upland habitats;

³ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2013. *Recovery Plan for Tidal Marsh Ecosystems of Northern and Central California*. Sacramento, California. xviii + 605 pp.

⁴ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2012. *Don Edwards SF Bay NWR Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan*. Newark, CA. 223 pp.

⁵ Economic evaluation of sea-level rise adaptation strongly influenced by hydrodynamic feedbacks. Michelle A. Hummel et al. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* Jul 2021, 118 (29) e2025961118; DOI: 10.1073/pnas.2025961118

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- Access to freshwater and sediment through the reconnection of Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District’s Line D and Line N that drain the Mowry Watershed and flow to Mowry Slough;
- Habitat for the Federally-endangered salt marsh harvest mouse, which has been documented on the site, and over a dozen special-status species including the American Peregrine Falcon, White-tailed Kite, Northern Harrier, Loggerhead Shrike, Alameda Song Sparrow, Bryant’s Savannah Sparrow, and San Francisco Common Yellowthroat and potential habitat for the California Black Rail and Tri-colored Blackbird;
- Support for resident waterbirds and thousands of migratory shorebirds and waterfowl who use the site as a stopover area on their journey along the Pacific Flyway;
- A habitat buffer for one of San Francisco Bay’s largest harbor seal pupping sites, located downstream near the mouth of Mowry Slough—a very sensitive location for this iconic San Francisco Bay species.

Newark Area 4 is simply one of the most important, unprotected wetland ecosystems remaining in San Francisco Bay, and one of the region’s best opportunities to employ nature-based solutions to combat climate change and ensure a resilient Bay and resilient Bay Area. Protecting, restoring and including Newark Area 4 baylands in the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge is an opportunity that is worthy of our region’s urgent attention and commitment.

Sincerely,

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