

Save The Bay's "Creeks to the Bay" Restoration Vision for Eastshore State Park

Save The Bay has a 40-year history of protecting the East Bay shoreline, and based on this experience, we have developed a comprehensive vision for Eastshore State Park (ESP). While it is not possible to return the East Bay shoreline to what it once was because of extensive filling and urban development, it is possible to protect, enhance, and restore our existing natural resources. Doing so in ESP will help create a more balanced, sustainable environment for humans and wildlife alike.

As stated in the ESP unit vision, "Bay Area residents have long hoped to reclaim their East Bay shoreline by enhancing this area with an inviting mix of recreational, scenic, and natural resources." This couldn't come at a better time. We have lost nearly 95 percent of the Estuary's tidal wetlands, and as the Bay Area's population soars in the next few decades, our wetlands and creeks will face increasing encroachment. The need for open space and recreational opportunities, particularly along the East Bay shoreline, will also grow. Increased public access to the shoreline, including compatible recreational facilities in appropriate locations, will re-connect people to the Bay watershed, educate them about the Bay's diverse ecosystem, encourage civic pride in the Bay, and build public support for Bay restoration. After decades of development (and development proposals) and more than a century of private ownership of much of the East Bay shoreline, we are finally able to reclaim and restore this priceless resource for both humans and wildlife. To accomplish this goal, we must strive to balance the park's recreational opportunities with protection and restoration of its natural resources.

Eastshore State Park has a unique opportunity to improve public access to the shoreline while protecting and enhancing the San Francisco Estuary and the creeks that flow to it. Rather than creating a conceptual plan that overlays a variety of recreational uses onto the landscape, Save The Bay believes that the underlying historical landscape must shape the plan. Although successive reconfiguration of the original landscape has occurred, the park's creeks are still present and represent what remains of the original landscape. Surrounded by artificial landforms, the creek mouths sustain critical biological resources and significant wetland habitat.

Ten creeks flow into the San Francisco Estuary within ESP boundaries. The collective watersheds of Meeker Slough and Baxter (Stege), Central, Cerrito, Codornices, Schoolhouse, Strawberry, Potter, Derby, and Temescal Creeks represent an important ecological link to the Bay. Because these watersheds are essential to the Bay's long-term health, we must restore the critical linkage between these creeks and the Bay, both functionally and ecologically. For this reason, Save The Bay strongly recommends that the ESP conceptual plan include protection and restoration of the park's creek mouths, associated tidal wetlands, and upstream creek corridors.



Our vision of restored creek-to-bay linkages can be achieved only if recreational activities are not superimposed onto the existing landscape, but are well-integrated with an ecologically focused plan that emphasizes protection and restoration of the shoreline and its creeks. Once this ecological framework is in place, recreational opportunities can be incorporated in a manner that minimizes impacts to plant and wildlife habitat. Save The Bay believes that the growing public support for creek and wetland restoration will serve as the foundation for a collaborative restoration project within ESP, particularly if articulated in the conceptual plan. Save The Bay, the Urban Creeks Council, local creek groups, and others are interested in participating in such an effort.

Save The Bay is committed to our "creeks to the Bay" restoration vision. To help achieve this goal, we strongly support the following general principles for protection and enhancement of wetlands and creeks within ESP:

- Restore or enhance all wetlands, creek mouths, creek corridors, and associated habitat within ESP. Creek mouths should be "de-piped" and allowed to create tidal and seasonal wetlands. Provide appropriate conditions for the restoration of native flora.
- Buffer wetlands, creek mouths, creek corridors, and associated habitat from areas of intensive human use (e.g., parking lots, playing fields, and multi-use paths). Provide habitat transitions wherever possible.
- Public access must be provided, but should be sited, designed, and managed to prevent significant adverse effects on wildlife and habitat.
- Provide a continuous Bay Trail linkage throughout ESP. Completing the Bay Trail along the East Bay shoreline will provide the public with a rich shoreline experience that includes wildlife observation and environmental education.
- Limit or exclude grass playing fields that require heavy use of pesticides and fertilizers that can negatively impact wetlands, wildlife, and Bay water quality. If such uses are included within ESP, artificial turf or buffer zones and swales must be used to prevent contaminants from flowing into sensitive habitat areas or the Bay.
- Distinction should be made between general recreation uses and recreational opportunities that require shoreline access. For example, unlike playing fields or motorized watercraft, human- and wind-powered watercraft (e.g., kayaks, windsurfers, canoes) require localized shoreline access with appropriate site conditions. Such uses should be accommodated where possible while minimizing impacts to plant and wildlife habitat.
- Manage the park in a manner that minimizes impacts to plant and wildlife habitat. Particular attention should be paid to migratory birds wintering within ESP.
- Provide opportunities for environmental education, including field trips for the public, with a focus on Bay ecology and the important environmental connection between freshwater creeks and the Estuary.
- Link creek corridors within ESP with upstream creek corridors and associated habitat. Not only will this provide essential wildlife corridors, but

also much needed human transportation corridors. Emphasis should be placed on providing linkages between ESP and the Ohlone Greenway.

- Strive to retain the park in a "natural," ecologically functional state. Urban development and impervious paving should be limited to the extent possible.

With respect to specific areas within ESP, Save The Bay has the following recommendations to help create the park's ecological framework:

- Preserve the Emeryville Crescent and Albany Mudflats as protected wetland and wildlife habitat with extremely limited public access.
- Protect, enhance, and restore the Brickyard, the Berkeley Meadow, and the Albany Bulb as wildlife habitat with limited public access. These areas currently provide valuable habitat and offer numerous opportunities for tidal and seasonal wetland restoration. Developed trails should be located around the perimeter of the Meadow and opportunities for nature interpretation provided.
- Preserve the Albany shoreline near Golden Gate Fields (i.e., Fleming Point) as one of the last remaining portions of historic shoreline in the East Bay. A Bay Trail linkage between the North Basin strip and the Albany Bulb should be developed.
- Seriously reconsider locating grass playing fields at the Albany Plateau. Given its proximity to the Albany Mudflats, this is a poor location for such uses and should be modified to prevent impacts to wildlife habitat or Bay water quality (see comments above).
- Acquire Hoffman Marsh, Stege Marsh, the former Liquid Gold site, the freshwater ponds near Zeneca, and other appropriate parcels along the Richmond shoreline at the earliest opportunity. The wetlands between Meeker Slough and the Albany Mudflats should be restored and managed as an integrated unit, including the wetlands and associated uplands contained at the U.C. Field Station—one of the last pristine moist grassland habitats in the Bay Area. Add all of these parcels to ESP and preserve them as a protected wildlife area similar to the Emeryville Crescent and Albany Mudflats.

It is not often that we are provided an opportunity to recreate our communities, to rethink assumptions and actions made years before. The creation of ESP is one such historic opportunity, and the chance to plan a contiguous 8 ½-mile strip of Bay shoreline should not be squandered. Yet it is a daunting task to juggle competing interests in a densely urban setting. Eastshore State Park provides a unique opportunity to expand public access to the Bay shoreline while protecting and enhancing the crucial link between the San Francisco Estuary and the creeks that flow to it.

Save The Bay is confident that we can create a park that will be a showcase of sustainable development with a strong creek-to-bay connection. Working together, we can reclaim the East Bay shoreline and create a park that not only sustains humans and celebrates our connection to the San Francisco Bay, but also sustains the plants

and animals sharing it with us and keeps the Bay and its watershed healthy for future generations.

Save The Bay's "Creeks to the Bay" Restoration Vision for Eastshore State Park has been endorsed by the following organizations:

- Urban Creeks Council
- Friends of Baxter Creek
- Friends of Five Creeks
- Friends of Strawberry Creek