THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA
WETLANDS ECOSYSTEM GOALS PROJECT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
October 19, 2015

CONTACT:
Dick.Wayman@scc.ca.gov P: 510-286-4182

Bay Area Scientists Urge Working With Nature to Protect SF Bayshore Communities from Rising Seas and Extreme Storms

Wetlands Can Protect Communities while Providing Many Other Benefits

San Francisco Bay Area – In a report released today, over 200 scientists and government officials propose a new approach to manage the challenge of sea level rise in San Francisco Bay: Work with nature, rather than against it, to protect homes, businesses and shoreline communities from sea level rise, extreme storms and flooding.

The report: "**The Baylands and Climate Change: What We Can Do,**" presents the latest science and new findings on the health and future of the bay's shore. It assesses the biggest threats and suggests a science-based roadmap to protect our communities with more resilient shorelines.

"This report tells us what we must do today to ensure a healthy San Francisco Bay for our children's future," said **Sam Schuchat, Executive Officer, State Coastal Conservancy,** which commissioned the report on behalf of a 21-member group of regional science, conservation, and government entities. "If we have the courage to act now and follow these scientific recommendations, we can secure much of what is most precious about living in the Bay Area and ensure the gratitude of future generations."

Instead of relying only on levees and sea walls, the report suggests ways to use wetlands along the shore to buffer the seven million people living in the Bay Area from rising seas and extreme storms. Wetlands knock down large waves, absorb excess water, filter pollutants, provide habitat for wildlife and places for people to enjoy the outdoors, and are part of the iconic beauty of San Francisco Bay.

"The people of the Bay Area rely on these wetlands for shoreline protection and many other benefits and yet have no idea that in a few decades they may start to disappear. Now is the moment to realize that we need to actively change how we manage our landscapes to keep this critical natural infrastructure in place and supporting our quality of life," said **Letitia Grenier, lead scientist for the project, of the San Francisco Estuary Institute**.

"Rising seas, more extreme weather events, and other impacts of climate change are already altering our region's ecosystems. This will accelerate in coming decades," said **Carl Wilcox, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, project co-chair and contributing author of Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals report (1999)**. "By using new scientific knowledge and tools, this report provides a roadmap for visionary management. This document provides a vital basis to sustain the iconic beauty and valuable services of our remarkable baylands for future Bay Area residents."

(MORE)

Given the importance of wetlands to the future of the Bay Area, the report lays out bold and immediate approaches for maintaining a healthy bay shore:

- **Work with nature, not against it.** Protect existing wetlands and help them grow to keep pace with sea level rise. Wetlands are self-maintaining and can be a resilient buffer against sea level rise and storms, if we allow the natural processes of water and earth that nourish them to occur. The alternative is sea walls and levees that require ongoing, expensive maintenance and none of the other benefits of wetlands.
- **Sediment [earth] is essential to grow and sustain our wetlands.** A major threat to S.F. Bay wetlands is a lack of sediment in the bay for sustaining their growth. Wetlands can keep up with rising seas only if sediment builds up along the surface of a marsh over time. This needed sediment can come from dredging of shipping and flood control channels, natural flows carried by streams, and other sources. Agencies have an opportunity to bring sediment to wetlands instead of dumping it in the ocean or in landfills.
- **Remember our streams.** One solution to rising bay waters is in our own backyards—managing our land and streams to deliver sediment and clean water to nourish marsh growth. It's time to work with the entire watershed system, from the hills to the bay.
- **Start today.** Time is a key factor. An accelerated effort could save over 80% of our existing wetlands over the next 100 years.

"These updated findings provide an urgently needed roadmap to secure the future of the San Francisco Bay shore during this time of rapid change," said **Ellie Cohen, President and CEO, Point Blue Conservation Science; co-founder, Bay Area Ecosystems Climate Change Consortium**. "Produced by leading scientists, managers, and decision makers, these practical, climate-smart recommendations will guide wetlands restoration and watershed management to sustain wildlife and people for decades to come."

"Around the world, it's the low income and disadvantaged communities who suffer the most from climate change," said **Assemblymember Tony Thurmond** (AD-15). "Here, in the Bay Area, it will be the lower income communities, 'in the flats' who will take the biggest hit from sea level rise and shoreline flooding. As we plan for sea level rise, let's make sure our decisions give priority to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities."

"The recommendations provided by over 100 of the region's leading scientists are invaluable for helping managers, scientists and decision-makers continue to make progress in restoring and maintaining our valuable wetlands," added **Michael Monroe, lead author and project co-chair for the Bayland Ecosystem Habitat Goals report (1999)**. "We now know we must accelerate our restoration efforts, and adopt new watershed and in-bay management practices to ensure there is sufficient sediment for the baylands to continue to provide a multitude of beneficial functions in the face of rising seas."

For more information and to review the report, visit www.baylandsgoals.org

###

S.F. Bay Area Wetlands Ecosystem Goals, 10-19-15
3-3-3

About the Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals

The Baylands and Climate Change: What We Can Do is an update to the 1999 *Baylands Ecosystem Habitat Goals* that for the first time set comprehensive restoration goals for the San Francisco Bay estuary. Produced by a collaborative of 21 management agencies working with a multi-disciplinary team of over 100 scientists, it synthesizes the latest science— particularly advances in the understanding of climate change and sediment supply— and incorporates projected changes through 2100 to generate new recommendations for achieving healthy baylands ecosystems.

The habitat acreage goals set in 1999 remain the same. Recommendations have been updated—and many new restoration approaches are suggested—for the region, its major subregions, and local shorelines. These actions must be integrated with civic and economic planning to arrive at appropriate implementation strategies. The report provides technical information that policy makers and others can use in deciding how to maximize ecosystem health.

Led by the State Coastal Conservancy under the auspices of the Bay Area Ecosystems Climate Change Consortium, with additional major funding from the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, the project's leadership includes:

Bay Area Flood Protection Agencies Association
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
California Department of Water Resources
Delta Conservancy
Delta Stewardship Council
East Bay Dischargers Association
East Bay Regional Park District
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
National Park Service / Golden Gate National Recreation Area
Point Blue Conservation Science
San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission
San Francisco Bay Joint Venture
San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board
San Francisco Estuary Institute
San Francisco Estuary Partnership
Suisun Resource Conservation District
URS Corporation
US Army Corps of Engineers
US Environmental Protection Agency
US Fish and Wildlife Service

Baylands Facts

- ***1800*** – Nearly 200,000 acres of tidal marsh existed in the region.
- ***1998*** – Only 40,000 acres of tidal marsh remain.
- ***2009*** – Restoration results in 46,000 acres of tidal marsh.
- ***Today*** – An additional 26,000 acres are in the process of restoration, which will achieve an estimated total of 72,000 acres of tidal marsh.
- ***Future*** – An additional 28,000 acres would be needed to conserved and restored to reach the regional tidal marsh habitat goal of 100,000 acres.