

Date Issued: May 27, 2011

**NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF A DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT
FOR THE HILL SLOUGH RESTORATION PROJECT**

The California Department of Fish and Game (DFG), the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) lead agency for the Hill Slough Restoration Project, will prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). This Notice of Preparation has been prepared to satisfy the requirements of CEQA.

The EIR will evaluate the environmental effects of implementing a restoration plan for 950 acres of managed wetlands adjacent to Hill and Suisun Sloughs, just outside Suisun City in Solano County.

The Hill Slough Restoration Project will restore a mosaic of wetland types including seasonal wetlands, tidal marsh, and subtidal and open water habitat. The purpose of the project is to restore natural hydrologic processes within a significant portion of the project area, thereby promoting restoration of ecological processes and functions, which will aid in the recovery of listed plant and wildlife species while contributing to primary productivity in the estuary. The Hill Slough site is owned and managed by DFG.

The project will be conducted in close coordination with U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Suisun Resource Conservation District, Bay Conservation Development Commission, Suisun City, Solano County, and other local agencies and members of the public.

A formal scoping meeting, designed to solicit public comments on the proposed action and alternatives, has also been scheduled

A public scoping meeting will be held at the Rush Ranch Conference Center located at 3521 Grizzly Island Rd Suisun City, CA 94585, on Tuesday, June 14th from 7:00 to 9:00pm.

This NOP is an important step in the scoping process, which is designed to determine the range of issues to be addressed in the EIR. The objectives of scoping include:

- Ensuring agency and public involvement in the environmental review process
- Determining which specific impacts must be evaluated in the EIR
- Establishing a reasonable range of alternatives
- Identifying the scope of issues that must be discussed in order to accurately address the potential impacts of the project

The DFG requests your comments on the scope and content of the draft EIR. Pursuant to CEQA Section 21080.4(a), responsible and trustee agencies are asked to

provide in writing the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to their statutory responsibilities, as these agencies will need to use the EIR prepared by DFG when considering permits or other approvals for the project. Responsible and trustee agencies are also requested to provide a list of the permits and/or other approvals that must be obtained in order to implement the project.

The major environmental issues to be addressed include:

- Hydrology/Water Quality
- Geology/Soils
- Biological Resources
- Transportation/Traffic
- Air Quality
- Noise
- Public Health (mosquito abatement)
- Recreation and Public Access
- Cultural Resources
- Utilities/Service Systems
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions

For additional information about the project or the scoping process, please contact:

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Written comments on the scope and content of the EIR should be directed to Sarah Estrella and must be received at the above address no later than June 29th 2011.

Distribution:

This Notice of Preparation was sent to the following agencies, organizations, firms, and individuals:

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
- NOAA Fisheries, formerly National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB)
- Bay Area Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB)
- Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD)
- Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC)
- State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO)
- Suisun Resource Conservation District
- Solano County
- City of Suisun
- Solano County Mosquito Abatement

Introduction:

The EIR will be prepared in compliance with CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines, as amended. The DFG will be the lead agency under CEQA. In accordance with CEQA, the lead agency has the responsibility for the scope, content, and legal adequacy of the document.

The Draft EIR (DEIR) will incorporate public concerns associated with the Proposed Action and associated project alternatives and will be sent out for a 45-day public review period, during which time both written and verbal comments will be solicited on the adequacy of the document. The Final EIR (FEIR) will address the comments received on the DEIR during public review. The document will be furnished to all who commented on the DEIR and made available to anyone who requests a copy during the 45-day public comment period. The draft and final EIR must (1) provide a full and fair discussion of the proposed action's significant environmental impacts and (2) inform the decision-makers and the public of reasonable alternatives that would avoid or minimize adverse impacts.

The final step in the CEQA process for the EIR is certifying the EIR and adopting a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan. A certified EIR indicates that the environmental document has been completed in compliance with CEQA, that the decision-making body of the lead agency reviewed and considered the FEIR prior to approving the project, and that the FEIR reflects the lead agency's independent judgment and analysis.

Project Location

The Hill Slough Restoration Project is approximately 950 acres located within the DFG Hill Slough Wildlife Management Area, just outside of Suisun City limits in Solano County, California (Figure 1). The site is bounded by State Route 12 and a tidal moat to the north, a maintained tidal channel (Whispering Bay) and Suisun Slough to the west, Hill Slough to the south, and McCoy Creek to the east. The DFG Hill Slough Wildlife Management Area extends east of the Project Site. Grizzly Island Road bisects the Project Site from north to south, and Laurel Creek flows east to west adjacent to State Route 12 at the site's northwest corner.

Purpose

The purpose of the project is to restore natural hydrologic processes within a significant portion of the project area, thereby promoting restoration of ecological processes and functions, which will aid in the recovery of listed plant and wildlife species while contributing to primary productivity in the estuary.

Project Description

DFG developed a range of restoration alternatives to meet the project purpose. The alternatives represent different numbers and locations of levee breaches resulting in different mixes of tidal and seasonal wetlands.

The restoration alternatives are:

- Alternative 1 –Mixed Tidal and Managed Wetlands
- Alternative 2 - Full Tidal
- Alternative 3A – West Side Tidal (Raised Road)
- Alternative 3B – West Side Tidal (Levee)
- No Project Alternative

Alternative 1 – Preferred Alternative

Under the preferred alternative, full tidal action would be restored to Hill Slough West and most of Hill Slough East (Ponds 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7). External levees to the west side of Grizzly Island Road and levees bordering Ponds 5, 6, and 7 on the east side of the road would be breached. The internal levee separating Pond 4 from Ponds 5 and 6 would be raised to prevent tidal inundation of Pond 4. The land on the north side of this levee (i.e., Ponds 4 and 4A) would remain as a mixture of perennial and seasonal wetlands and uplands but would be improved to increase native vegetation and quality of wildlife habitat. To protect Grizzly Island Road from potential flooding associated with increased tidal flow at the project site, Grizzly Island Road will be raised above the 100-year flood level. Because Pond 2

would be subject to tidal inundation, access to the Pacific Gas and Electric transmission tower in the pond and line clearance requirements would not be met. The project would include a boardwalk to the tower, improvement to tower footings, and raising of the towers to provide clearance for the lines. See Figure 2.

Project Elements Summary

- Ponds 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7 opened to tidal action
 - 8 external levee breaches
 - 2 internal levee breaches
- Height of Pond 4 levee increased to exclude tidal flows
- Height of the levee increased between Ponds 2 and 3
- Portions of the levee adjacent to Suisun and Hill Sloughs lowered
- Culverts between Pond 2 and Pond 3 and from Pond 4 and Pond 5
- Grizzly Island Road raised
- Loop trail across Hill Slough East on top of Pond 4 levee and existing access road
- Trail to an overlook on Ponds 2 and 3 levee
- Overlooks with benches at end of trails
- Parking area at intersection of Pond 3 levee and Grizzly Island Road
- Replacement of concrete footings for two transmission towers
- Boardwalk spur for access to tower in Pond 2 with locked access

Raise Grizzly Island Road

To prevent flooding, Grizzly Island Road will be raised above the 100-year water level.

Breaches

Breaches will be constructed by excavating gaps in the levees. The breach locations were chosen to achieve a balance between three primary objectives:

- (1) To take advantage of the pre-existing, historic drainage network
- (2) To emphasize the re-creation of higher order (larger) tidal channels within the marsh restoration area
- (3) To provide drainage for the entire site

Levees would be breached:

- At two locations from Suisun Slough to Ponds 1 and 2
- From Suisun Slough to Pond 3
- At two locations from Hill Slough to Pond 3
- At two locations from Hill Slough to Ponds 5 and 7
- From McCoy Creek to Pond 7
- At internal breaches at two locations from Ponds 5 and 7 to Pond 6

Levee Improvements/Modifications

The Pond 2 levee adjacent to Suisun Slough and the Ponds 5 and 7 levees adjacent to Hill Slough will be lowered to provide fill material for the road and levee raising and to increase high marsh habitat.

The crest of the levee that separates Pond 4 from Ponds 5 and 6 will be raised to +9.3 (elevation equal to 10-year water level plus 1 ft for sea level rise). A trail will be constructed on the levee top. The trail surface will be drivable in all weather and will provide PG&E access to the transmission towers.

The crest of the levee that separates Ponds 2 and 3 will be raised to +9.3 (elevation equal to 10-year water level plus 1 ft for sea level rise). A trail will be constructed on the levee top. The trail surface will be drivable in all weather and will provide PG&E access to the transmission towers.

Culverts

To improve internal circulation of tidal flow, a culvert could be constructed in the levee that separates Pond 2 and Pond 3.

To facilitate drainage and increase management options, culverts could either be replaced or improved between Ponds 4A and 4 and between Ponds 4 and 5.

PG&E Tower Improvement, Line Clearance, and Access

The footings on the three towers west of Grizzly Island Road will be redesigned to withstand full tidal inundation.

When Grizzly Island Road is raised, the line clearance across the road will not be sufficient. The tower adjacent to the road will be raised to meet the line clearance requirement. When Pond 2 is breached, the line clearance will not be sufficient to accommodate boats. The towers in Pond 2 will be raised to provide sufficient line clearance.

PG&E access will be improved over existing conditions:

- Access to towers east of Grizzly Island Road will be provided by a drivable all weather trail
- Towers west of the road will be accessed by a drivable all weather trail
- A short locked boardwalk will be constructed to the tower in Pond 2

Alternative 2 - Full Tidal

Alternative 2 is the same as Alternative 1, except the levees separating Pond 4 from Ponds 5 and 6 would be breached; all of Ponds 4A and 4 would be subject to tidal inundation. Under this alternative, the PG&E towers in Pond 4 would be impacted. An approximately 3,500-foot catwalk would provide access to the towers, and the footings of five additional transmission towers would have to be improved. Implementation of this alternative would lead to the loss of public access on the road that separates Pond 4A and 4.

Alternative 3A – West Side Tidal (Raised Road)

Alternative 3A is the same as Alternative 1, except none of the project features east of Grizzly Island Road would be constructed.

Alternative 3B – West Side Tidal (Levee)

Alternative 3B is the same as Alternative 3A, except instead of raising Grizzly Island Road for flood protection, a levee would be constructed on the east side of Ponds 1, 2 and 3.

Issue Analysis

Internal agency scoping determined that there would be no impacts to the following resource areas and that these resource areas could therefore be eliminated from further consideration in the EIR:

- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Agricultural Resources
- Land Use/Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Public Services
- Aesthetics
- Population/Housing
- Socioeconomics

For each resource listed below, the EIR will include a discussion of the regulatory setting, methods, and significance criteria used in evaluating the impacts; potential impacts from the various alternatives; and recommended mitigation, indicating the effectiveness of mitigation measures proposed to be implemented and what, if any, additional measures would be required to reduce the impacts to below a level of significance. Direct and indirect impacts that will be analyzed include disturbance during construction of water control structures, changes in hydrology in the creeks and sloughs, and changes in fish and wildlife habitat. In addition, the impact discussion will also identify any areas of known controversy. Finally, the EIR will identify any unavoidable adverse impacts that would result from project implementation.

The list of issues presented below is preliminary both in scope and number. These issues are presented to facilitate public comment on the EIR and are not intended to be all-inclusive or to be a predetermination of impacts to be considered.

- Hydrology/Water Quality
- Geology/Soils
- Biological Resources
- Transportation/Traffic

- Air Quality
- Noise
- Public Health (mosquito abatement)
- Recreation and Public Access
- Cultural Resources
- Utilities/Service System
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Hydrology and Water Quality

The project could potentially increase turbidity during and after construction, adversely affecting water quality. In addition, flows along Hill Slough, Suisun Slough, and McCoy Creek are likely to change with the increased tidal prism following restoration; these increased flows could affect water quality and erosion along these waterways. Potential flood hazards issues also exist. Changes to site hydrology may increase methyl-mercury levels.

The EIR will:

- Review and summarize the existing methyl-mercury studies and identify any potential impacts based on that information
- Analyze project impacts due to changed hydrology on the basis of existing information
- Analyze project impacts of sedimentation, tidal hydrology, and on-site and off-site flooding
- If impacts are identified, propose appropriate mitigation measures

Geology and Soils

Geologic issues include potential erosion during and after construction due to proposed grading and levee reconfiguration.

The EIR will:

- Describe the site's geologic conditions/hazards based on existing information and geologic/geotechnical/hydrologic reports for the site and nearby past projects
- Summarize the implications of these conditions with respect to project outcomes and, if necessary, identify appropriate mitigation measures

Biological Resources

*Implementation of the project will turn existing managed ponds into tidal marsh. The increase in tidal marsh would benefit terrestrial and aquatic plants and animals that are dependent on tidal marsh habitat. Salt marsh harvest mouse (*Reithrodontomys raviventris*), listed as endangered under the California and federal Endangered Species Acts, is known to occur at the project site.*

The EIR will:

- Identify and describe existing biological resources, including wetland and upland vegetation communities and habitats on the site
- Evaluate how project alternatives are likely to differ in producing different amounts and configurations of wetland and aquatic habitats over time
- Discuss beneficial and detrimental effects to special status species (wildlife, fish, and plants), critical habitat, and essential fish habitat
- If impacts are identified, propose appropriate mitigation measures

Traffic.

The proposed work on Grizzly Island Road will cause short-term impacts to traffic.

The EIR will:

- Describe existing roadway facilities and bicycle/pedestrian facilities and discuss the existing traffic volumes and level of service in the project study area
- Address potential traffic impacts from the restoration project, including construction traffic impacts
- If impacts are identified, propose appropriate mitigation measures

Noise

The proposed project components could have short-term noise impacts from earthmoving equipment during construction.

The EIR will:

- Identify and discuss short-term construction noise impacts, as well as necessary mitigation measures to reduce these impacts to a less than significant level

Public Health (Mosquito Abatement)

The proposed project may increase mosquito-breeding habitat.

The EIR will:

- Identify and discuss mosquito breeding habitat issues, as well as necessary mitigation measures to reduce these impacts to a less than significant level

Air Quality Issues

Implementation of the proposed project could have short-term air quality impacts due to fugitive dust and exhaust from earthmoving during construction.

The EIR will:

- Identify and discuss short-term construction dust impacts, as well as necessary mitigation measures to reduce these impacts to a less than significant level

Recreation and Public Access

The trails and limited parking in the proposed project will have a positive impact on recreation and increase public access.

Cultural Resources

The site may contain prehistoric cultural resources that may be affected by project development.

The EIR will:

- Review studies by Northwest Information Center, Sonoma State University to determine if any previous cultural resources have been identified in the project area
- Identify appropriate mitigation measures to address the possibility of encountering previously unknown cultural resources during construction, public access, or adaptive management activities

Utilities/Service Systems

Construction and operation of the project may affect PG&E transmission lines.

The EIR will:

- Discuss maintaining sufficient access to Pacific Gas and Electric Company's overhead transmission lines and issues related to line clearance above the restored marsh plain and Grizzly Island Road
- Identify appropriate mitigation measures for any potential impacts to Pacific Gas and Electric Company's infrastructure

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

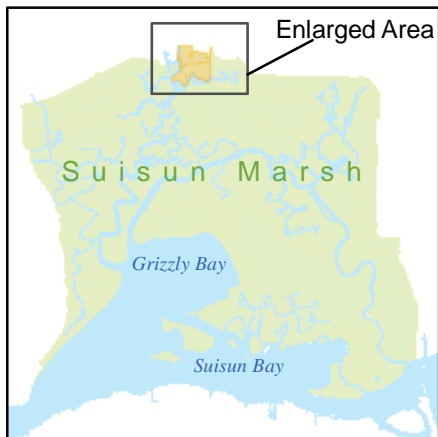
Implementation of the proposed project could produce short-term emissions of greenhouse gas from the motor exhaust of earthmoving equipment during construction.

The EIR will:

- Identify and discuss short-term construction greenhouse emissions impacts, as well as necessary mitigation measures to reduce these impacts to a less than significant level

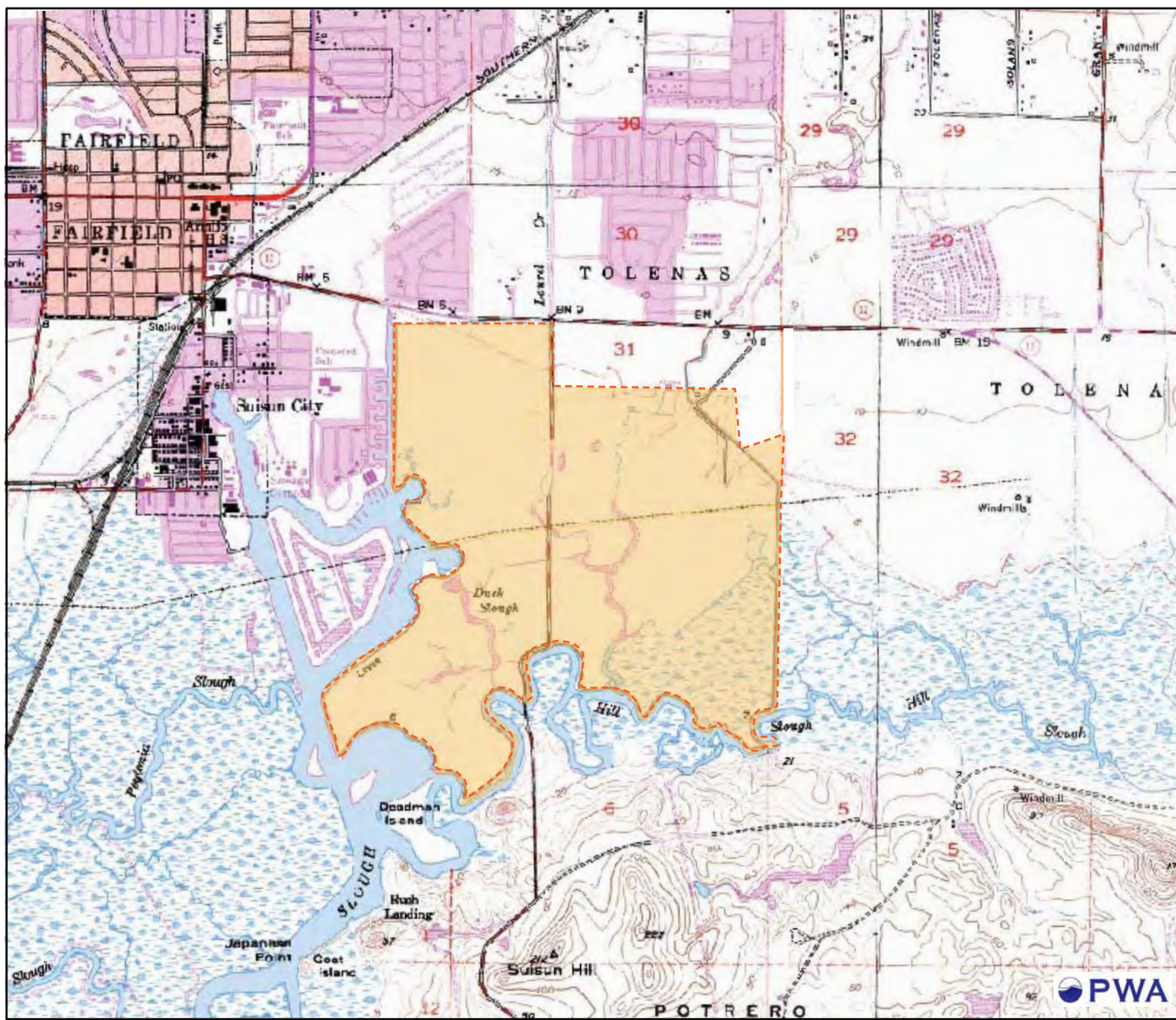
Hill Slough Restoration Project

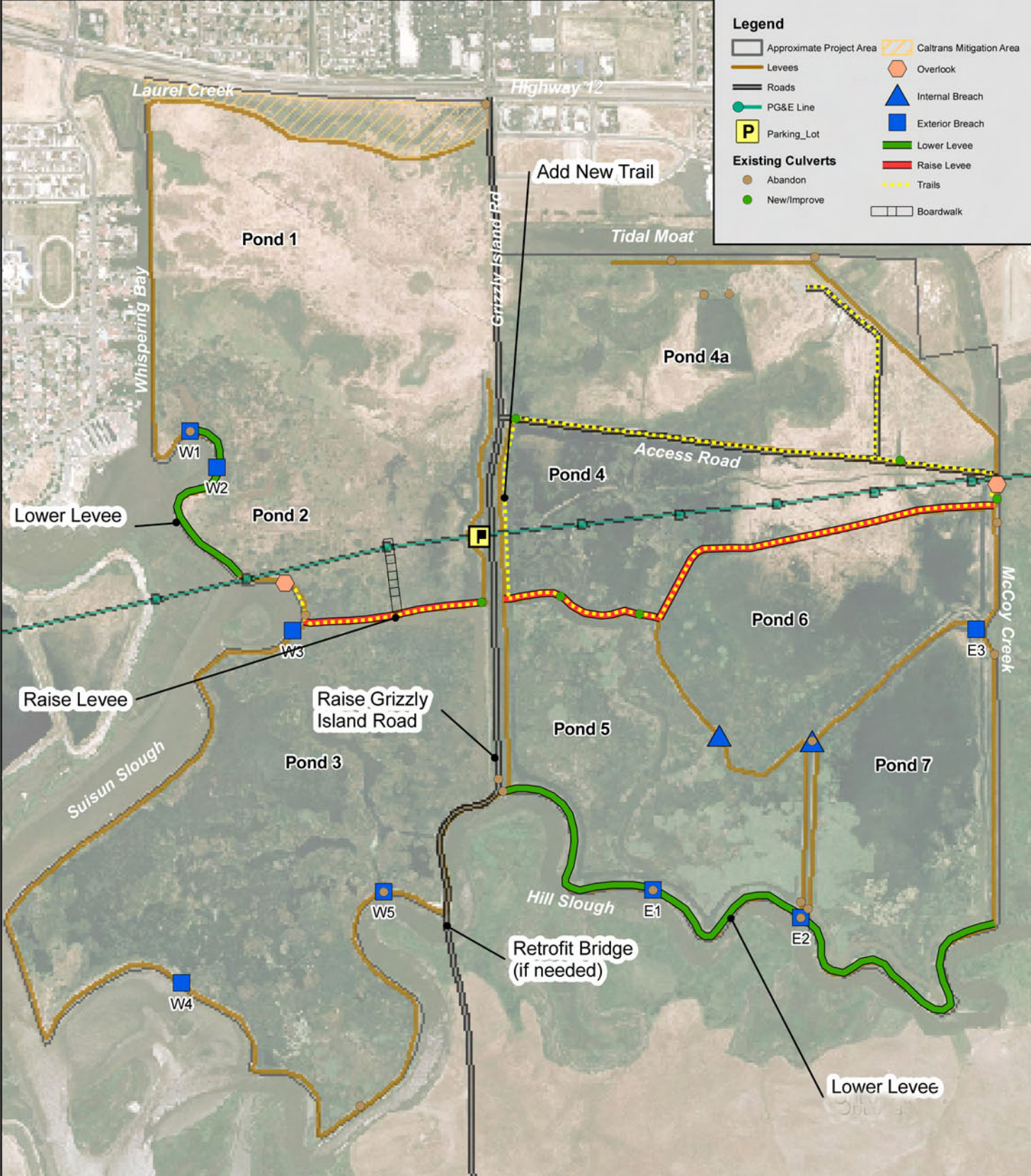
Regional Location Map



The Hill Slough Restoration Project is located in northern Suisun Marsh, Solano County, California. The goal of the project is to restore diked managed wetlands to tidal wetlands.

 Hill Slough Restoration Project Area





Legend

Approximate Project Area	Caltrans Mitigation Area
Levees	Overlook
Roads	Internal Breach
PG&E Line	Exterior Breach
Parking Lot	Lower Levee
Existing Culverts	Raise Levee
Abandon	Trails
New/Improve	Boardwalk

Source: National Agriculture Imagery Program (NAIP, 2006).
 Notes: Culvert locations are approximate.

Hill Slough Restoration Project Figure 2

Preferred Alternative
 Construction Elements

PWA Ref# - 1950

