



September 6, 2006

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TO: Richmond City Council (Irma L Anderson, Jim Rogers, Richard Griffin, Nathaniel Bates, Tom Butt, John Marquez, Gayle McLaughlin, Tony Thurmond, Maria Viramontes)

SUBJECT: Proposed Deep Water Port

Dear Mayor Anderson and City Council Members:

I am writing on behalf of the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture (SFBJV) as we have recently learned that the City of Richmond is considering a proposal for a deep-water port adjacent to Wildcat Creek Marsh. The SFBJV is quite concerned about this proposal.

The SFBJV understands that there may be a perception that the construction and operation of such a facility would be conducive to co-existence with marsh habitat. Although the SFBJV does not yet have all the details of the proposal, we wish to address this perception, provide the City with information about the habitat values of Wildcat Creek Marsh and the adjacent eelgrass beds, and share our concerns about this proposal.

The goal of the SFBJV is to protect, restore, increase and enhance all types of wetlands, riparian habitat and associated uplands throughout the San Francisco Bay region to benefit birds, fish and other wildlife. The Management Board consists of 27 agencies, businesses, and private organizations whose members agree to support and promote the goal and objectives of the Joint Venture and who represent the diversity of wetland interests found in the San Francisco Bay Region. The SFBJV is one of the twelve wetland habitat Joint Ventures operating under the certification of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, a Congressional agreement between the United States, Canada, and Mexico. The SFBJV seeks to protect, restore, and enhance 200,000 acres of wetland habitats for migratory birds, endangered species, and other wildlife.

The City of Richmond has the longest shoreline of any municipality on San Francisco Bay. Within the City limits are unspoiled and restorable habitats including wetlands, shoreline areas, and underwater habitats such as eelgrass beds. These habitats provide resource values for wildlife as well as the citizens of Richmond and the Bay Area.

Deep Water Ports and Adjacent Wetlands Are Not Always Compatible

The 250-acre Wildcat Creek Marsh is the largest remaining tidal marsh in the northern East Bay. Wetlands are shallow transition between land and open water and mudflats. They provide a buffer from tides and floods as well habitat for a myriad of species of wildlife. Because San Francisco Bay has lost

80% of its historic wetlands habitats, many of the tidal wetland species are now endangered. Wildcat Creek Marsh is home to more than 100 species of birds as well as endangered species such as the California Clapper Rail and Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse. US Fish and Wildlife Service has identified “Birds of Management Concern” including the Long-billed Curlew and Osprey. Wildcat Creek Wetlands is one of the locations in San Francisco Bay most utilized for feeding by Long-billed Curlew. The only recent nesting site of Osprey in this area of the Bay is also adjacent to the wetlands. These species and others will be compromised if a deep-water port fragments the marsh and surrounding Bay habitats.

These and other species thrive in Wildcat Creek Marsh due to its size, relatively natural setting, and tidal exchange. To construct a port in such a setting will fragment habitat and reduce the natural and flood control functions of the wetlands. The port and access channels would require continuous dredging, again disrupting the marsh not only by the dredging itself but also potentially by suspended sediments dredging creates.

This information provided above is not intended to downplay the importance of the smaller marshes in the Central Bay adjacent to ports. We understand that this may be the comparison for the City’s proposed port project. Unfortunately, due to urbanization long ago, the remaining marshes in the Central Bay are smaller, and the SFBJV continues to advocate for protection and restoration of additional wetland habitat in heavily impacted areas of the Bay to increase habitat value and provide connectivity for migrating species to the larger wetlands in the South Bay and in San Pablo Bay, such as Wildcat Creek Marsh.

Deep Water Port Will Threaten Remaining Eelgrass Beds

Eelgrass was once prolific sub-tidal vegetation in San Francisco Bay. Eelgrass provides the spawning habitat for Pacific herring, harbors juvenile salmon, ling cod, and other juvenile fish. It provides foraging habitat to the endangered Least Tern and to several species of diving waterfowl such as Great and Lesser Scaup and Surf Scoters. Due to a number of factors (habitat degradation, storms, and substrate erosion and siltation) many of the eelgrass beds in San Francisco Bay have been extirpated, reduced in size, or fragmented. The largest remaining eelgrass bed in San Francisco Bay is at Point San Pablo. This area also harbors large populations of diving waterfowl due to its semi-protected nature and the availability of foraging habitat in and around the eelgrass bed.

The Subtidal Areas section of the Bay Plan (Bay Conservation and Development Commission) requires conservation of eelgrass beds. Deep-water port access will require dredging through the Pt. San Pablo eelgrass bed. Wave fetch from ship traffic will erode the bed and suspend sediments that will limit light availability and degrade the quality of eelgrass that is not directly eliminated by dredging.

While the SFBJV recognizes that the City of Richmond seeks ways to generate revenue, the deep-water port will cause ongoing serious environmental damage to resources that have been targeted for protection. The SFBJV encourages the City of Richmond to pursue less environmentally harmful ventures and to embrace the natural habitats that enrich the Richmond shoreline. The SFBJV will be glad to work with the City of Richmond as we have with other municipalities to help bring about the economic and recreational benefits of protected and restored natural areas. If you have further questions about the SFBJV, the information provided in this letter, or our position on the subject, please contact our SFBJV Coordinator, Beth Huning.

Sincerely,



Arthur Feinstein
Chair

Cc: SFBJV Management Board