

- Offer to present our new PowerPoint, *Discover California Grasslands*, to a local school or organization.
I'll be guest speaker at the Environmental Forum of Santa Rosa Junior College on March 24th.
- Offer to lead a grassland walk in conjunction with a local park or resource management agency.
I'll be leading a walk at Helen Putnam Park in Petaluma on April 18th with Sonoma County Regional Parks.
- Take advantage of connections with your local resource managers and environmental community to collaborate in hosting a CNGA workshop or event.
I contacted the Sonoma County Water Agency and they agreed to host and sponsor our workshop "Using Native Grasses in the Water-Conserving Landscape" on February 5th. Their sponsorship allows us to offer this outstanding workshop for a \$50 discount!

Here are a few more ideas: Buy a gift of CNGA membership for a friend or colleague; Help out on a CNGA committee; Think about running for a board position, truly an opportunity, as I've found, that allows you to be a part of something bigger than ourselves.

CNGA is a million-dollar organization... that operates on less than \$100k per year! That's not a lot of money for an organization with statewide ambitions. But it's not just money that makes an organization successful; it's the passionate involvement of the members and willingness to give something back to the organization. Please join me in making this a successful year for CNGA—and for California's grasslands!

Join us on June 3–4 for
**Grasslands of the
California North Coast:
A Symposium**
Registration form on page 19

Coastal Prairie Mapping Project Revived

The Coastal Prairie Enhancement Feasibility Study, a project of Ocean Song Farm and Wilderness Center and the Sonoma–Marin Coastal Grasslands Working Group, has been funded through September 2010 (the project had been dormant as a result of the state bond freeze). With this fresh infusion of funds, the project to map Sonoma and Marin coastal grasslands will get underway this spring.

Study participants will collect existing knowledge of native grassland locations. They are asking local grassland specialists, including CNGA Past President David Amme, to contribute their expertise. Over the past year, Alex Koltunov and Ayzik Solomesheh of UC Davis have been preparing a preliminary vegetation map and field sampling plan. Once the “local knowledge”

information has been recorded, Alex will incorporate it into a new GIS layer that will aid in designing the field plan.

Kathleen Kraft, the study's project coordinator, and botanist Linda Esposito have put together five large maps covering coastal Marin and Sonoma Counties, from the Golden Gate to Gualala (at the border between Sonoma and Mendocino Counties). The inland extent of the project area is roughly the Highway 101 corridor. Approximate locations of significant grasslands (and wildflower fields) will be identified by the local experts and pinpointed on the maps.

Data for each location will be recorded and will include why the site is important, directions to the site, and any species lists/maps/reports for that location.

Rare Hoover Semaphore Grass Threatened

DAVID AMME, CNGA Past President

One of the few remaining populations of the rare Hoover (aka North Coast) semaphore grass (*Pleuropogon hooverianus*) in California is slated for removal by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) as part of a freeway bypass project in the central Mendocino County town of Willits. (This rare grass was highlighted in the summer 2009 issue of *Grasslands*.) *Pleuropogon hooverianus* is listed as threatened by the State of California.

The original Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) was completed in 2006; apparently *P. hooverianus* was not mentioned in this document. After the FEIR was published, *P. hooverianus* was discovered within the project limits. Caltrans published a draft Supplemental EIR (SEIR) in November 2009 and released it for comment (unfortunately, during the holiday season). Public comments are due by January 15, 2010.

The Caltrans SEIR is intended to show the California Department of Fish and Game how impacts to this threatened plant will be avoided, minimized, and fully mitigated. The SEIR proposes to “permanently impact” 0.66 acres, or two-thirds of the *P. hooverianus* population, as part of the Willits Bypass construction (“permanently impact” usually means “eliminate”). The SEIR also notes that the remaining 0.38 acres may be damaged by changes to highway drainage. To mitigate for this loss, the SEIR proposes to reseed this rare plant and to commit to protection of other *P. hooverianus* populations.

Only 20 occurrences of *P. hooverianus* have been documented in California, according to the California Natural Diversity Database (May 2009, RareFind 2 Personal Computer Program. California Department of Fish and Game, Sacramento).

CNGA is preparing comments for the Draft SEIR. Readers are encouraged to follow the permit process on the SEIR for the Willits Bypass at: [HTTP://WWW.DOT.CA.GOV/DIST1/D1PROJECTS/WILLITS/INDEX.HTM](http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist1/d1/projects/willits/index.htm).

SPECIAL REPORT: Rare S.F. Bay Native Coastal Prairie Site Proposed for Major Casino Project

JIM HANSON, CNGA Board Member, Oakland

One of the last relatively undeveloped tracts of public land on the San Francisco Bay shoreline is being eyed for a major casino project.

At 124,000 square feet of card tables and slot machines (4,000 of them), a developer/tribe partnership is pursuing a casino on San Francisco Bay at Point Molate that would surpass the size of most casinos on the Las Vegas Strip.

Point Molate is at the western edge of the Potrero Hills at the tidal transition between San Pablo and San Francisco Bays.

It is a quiet, natural landscape that most residents have never seen. From here one can take in breathtaking views from atop hills carpeted with native bunchgrasses.

Point Molate shares the geology of its sister hills across bay waters in Marin, still sustaining many of the same plant species that inhabited the area before San Francisco Bay existed (CNPS 2009). The bridge spanning from Richmond to San Rafael now connects them. This near-island was officially connected to the East Bay when a large, intervening shoreline marsh between Point Molate and Richmond was filled in (in an era when filling the bay tidelands

was common) (Rose-lius 2005).

Waves of Spanish, early East Coast, and post-World War II settlers have made an impact on eastern landscapes of the San Francisco and San Pablo Bays, but the first recorded settlements were Ohlone and Coast Miwok (Contra Costa County 2008a, 2009). During the 1900s, a West-Coast wine distribution center and a Naval Fuel Depot occupied Point Molate. In 2003, the land was turned over to the City of Richmond by the Navy for \$1 (Brenneman 2009).

Although some native grasslands are affected by management choices such

as mowing or grazing, the stewardship of Point Molate's native prairie rests primarily on choices arising out of the political-economic ecology of local, state, and federal influences. Therefore, this article attempts to offer a glimpse of the dynamics and guiding beliefs that will affect the choices for this public land on San Francisco Bay.

What's on the Table Now for Point Molate?

Shortly after the City of Richmond acquired the land from the Navy, the developer, in partnership with the 11-member, Ukiah-based Guidiville Band of Pomo Indians, presented casino plans based on the claim that Point Molate was ancestral Pomo land.

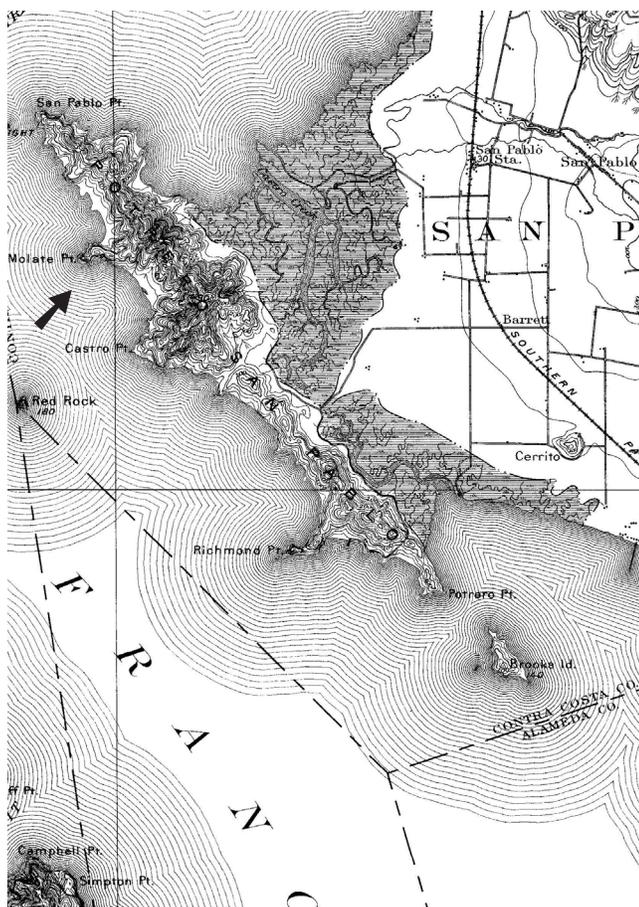
A public hearing in September on the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) presented four development options for the site, three of which included a casino (Richmond/BIA 2009). Other health, educational institution, or "green" energy development alternatives that potentially could return a fiscal benefit to the City were not included for comment or consideration.

At the hearing, several people who commented on the casino project felt it would provide jobs for the city's unemployed, while others said the project DEIR—because of its limited information on employment, crime, traffic, and environmental concerns—was missing important details.

Some residents pressed for details on the actual number of promised jobs and estimated wages. Others cited statistics on how crime and problem gambling escalate if a full-scale casino is brought close to a metropolitan area.

A traffic engineer volunteered his analysis of inadequate road access; access to the

SF BAY COASTAL PRAIRIE/CASINO, continued on p. 5



USGS survey map from late 1800s showing Point Molate and the surrounding hills when it was called "Potrero San Pablo." "Potrero" means "meadows/grasslands." Map provided by David Amme

SF BAY COASTAL PRAIRIE/CASINO, continued from p. 4

Point is by a two-lane road right next to the Richmond–San Rafael Bridge toll plaza. A 32-page Technical Peer Review of the DEIR by ESA Associates concludes that it is incomplete and that a revised Draft EIS/EIR should be prepared and recirculated (CFSPM 2009).

Lech Naumovich, California Native Plant Society (CNPS) East Bay Chapter conservation analyst, testified and submitted a detailed analysis of the DEIR (CNPS 2009). CNGA and CNPS spoke to the document's omission of the rare native coastal grassland community currently flourishing across the hills and along the shoreline.

Under federal and state law, the environmental review document is to contain a full and accurate description of the proposed project. An accurate project description provides the basis for assessing

impacts to sensitive environmental resources and social concerns for avoidance or mitigation. The EIR is essentially an “environmental accountability statement.”

In the consultant-prepared project document, the heritage native prairie located within the project boundaries is labeled only as a weedy “annual grassland” (Richmond/BIA 2009, p. 3.5-13, and Habitat Map, p. 3.5-1). The DEIR proposes to mitigate the loss of annual grassland by replanting annual grassland on the project site (Richmond/BIA 2009, p. 5-17). Coastal prairie within the 413-acre project boundaries, either inside or outside the direct construction area, is not recognized.

A Unique, Special Place

Besides providing the largest intact expanse of non-serpentine native coastal prairie remaining within the dense, urban

San Francisco Bay Area, the site also provides rare habitat for populations of state- and federally protected birds. Point Molate falls within Audubon's North Richmond Wetlands Important Bird Area (IBA), which tallied 92 species in a 2007–2008 census. Surveyed species from the North Richmond Wetlands IBA included marbled godwit, Clark's grebe, long-billed curlew, sanderling, black skimmer, Thayer's gull, peregrine falcon, bald eagle, and brown pelican (Audubon California 2008).

Large, intact expanses of eelgrass beds, considered indispensable for the health of the Bay, are “home to many small organisms that are food for large species. . . they provide protective cover for migrating salmon, provide a spawning substrate for Pacific herring, and act as a nursery for many other smaller fish” (CNPS 2009).

SF BAY COASTAL PRAIRIE/CASINO, continued on p. 6



Coastal scrub bluff on Point Molate in foreground. Hills in background support coastal prairie and coastal scrub at southern half of proposed project area.

Photo: Jim Hanson

For years, CNGA member Dave Amme has taken Bay Area residents on walks to the Point to explore the native grassland. Seed from *Festuca rubra* “Molate Point” (Molate fescue), now being used in native grassland revegetation settings as well as in drought-tolerant native landscapes, was originally collected in the early 1980s at Point Molate.

The East Bay CNPS Chapter has identified Point Molate as one of 15 Priority Plant Protection Areas in the East Bay, noting that, “the number of rare and unusual plants known from the Molate are as numerous as any given botanical preserve in the East Bay” (CNPS 2009).

Although dense, invasive broom (*Genista monspessulana*) and blue gum eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*) groves extend uphill from disturbed land around the former fuel depot and wine facilities, the author has observed that intact coastal prairie, coastal scrub, coastal strand, mixed riparian, and seasonal wetland plant communities still appear to cover the majority of the largely vegetated site. These



Dense purple needlegrass (*Nassella pulchra*) prairie on hills in the south section of the project area; toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) “tree” in background Photo: Jim Hanson



CNPS hikers take a lunch break on coastal prairie with view of San Pablo Bay. Photo: David Amme

native plant communities show signs of stability and a long residence. A walk through these hills will reveal stately toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*) shrubs that can be mistaken for coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*) trees.

Visits by the author and others point to ecological mysteries awaiting further investigation. For instance, invasive fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) dominates in thick patches on disturbed sites in the Bay Area. Sporadically spaced fennel plants are heavily pruned back and kept in check (possibly due to the acquired taste of the resident deer). In the coastal prairie at Point Molate, fennel plants appear to be in balance as simply another resident grassland forb.

Among the blue gum eucalyptus, occasional *Ribes* species, toyon, and blue Molate fescue still persist.

Amme (pers. comm. 2003) has observed that the native coastal prairies seem to somehow also keep persistent coyote brush (*Baccharis pilularis consanguinea*) in check.

Claim to Point Molate Challenged

To turn Point Molate into a casino development, federal law requires that a tribe prove it has “a significant historical connection” to any land acquired after 1988. (A “Restored Lands Exception”

allows gambling if original ancestral land is restored.) (Contra Costa County 2008a,b; 2009).

The Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors weighed in on this question by conducting in-depth studies of the tribe’s ancestral residence claim. In a February 27, 2008, letter, Board of Supervisors Chair Federal D. Glover stated unequivocally that “(the tribe) has no geographic, historic, cultural, or modern connection to the Point Molate property. . . . Outside investors acquired the property for the sole purpose of using the Band to build an urban casino in Contra Costa County and thus tap into the lucrative San Francisco Bay Area market” (Contra Costa County 2008a).

Despite the determination that the Band had no viable historical or modern connection to the Point Molate site, the Board of Supervisors recently dropped its objection to the project after Supervisor John Gioia abruptly reversed his position. Revenue promises were made to the County, a move the *Contra Costa Times* (2009) called paltry and “a horrible sell-out deal.” (The County’s determination of historical East Bay residence by Ohlone and Coast Miwok has not been retracted.)

Many residents to this day do not know that a major casino is actively in the works

Classification of Grasslands at Point Molate, Contra Costa County, California, Using the New *Manual of California Vegetation*

With the release of the new *Manual of California Vegetation, Second Edition*, (hereafter *MCV2*) published by the California Native Plant Society in collaboration with the California Department of Fish and Game (Sawyer, Keeler-Wolf, and Evens 2009), ecologists have a new tool for communicating more clearly regarding vegetation types. Much of the grassland vegetation at Pt. Molate most closely resembles the following Alliances, as described in the *MCV2*:

- *Danthonia californica* Alliance;
- *Festuca rubra* Alliance; and
- *Nassella pulchra* Alliance

Although quantitative data on which to base this evaluation is lacking, species lists and observations from numerous field trips to the area have been provided by CNGA Past President and Grass Identification Instructor David Amme. Amme and other botanical experts have documented significant areas of native perennial grassland, along with a native perennial grass understory within coastal scrub habitat, throughout the project area. However, in the environmental review documents for the proposed casino at Point Molate, all grasslands within the project boundaries have been lumped, erroneously according to local CNGA board members, into “California Annual Grasslands” without any discussion of the native perennial stands.

As noted in the accompanying article, the coastal prairie at Point Molate is rare in the Bay Area by virtue of size, substrate, abundance, and as a living example of the natural heritage of the San Francisco Bay. Intact Bay Area coastal grassland is most often found on serpentine because the magnesium and iron-rich substrates inhibit annual weeds. Point Molate’s high native perennial grass abundance is found on a fine Millsholm loam—a material weathered from sandstone and shale (California Soil Resource Lab 2009). The major native grassland plant communities that are present at Pt. Molate (*Danthonia californica*, *Festuca rubra*, and *Nassella pulchra*) are also considered rare plant communities by the California Department of Fish and Game (2003).

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for public land on San Francisco Bay. The Web sites and newsletters of many local politicians, and even several large, well-known Bay Area environmental groups, have yet to state a position. Consequently,

media coverage has been scant. At the same time, Mayor Gayle McLaughlin of Richmond (Brenneman 2009) and Citizens for a Sustainable Point Molate (CFSPM 2009) continue to press for what they

believe are more forward-thinking alternatives that better promote the health of Richmond and the Bay Area.

The Choice Ahead

The final decision may rest with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Interior Secretary Kenneth Salazar’s enforcement of federal law on the Restored Lands Exception. In September, Senators Boxer and Feinstein wrote to Secretary Salazar expressing strong opposition to taking off-reservation lands into trust for gaming purposes.

The majority of Bay Area voters tend to be politically liberal and accept tribal gambling as a way to address past wrongs, which for Bay Area tribes began with Spanish settlements and missions (Goerke 2007). Yet, in-depth reports over the years are bringing to light economic and environmental justice issues resulting from current-day tribal gambling expansion (Barlett and Steele 2002a,b; King 1989; USA Today 2008; University of Buffalo 2005; Owings 2007; Marinucci 2009).

Also, differences of values for local land-use are surfacing in some California communities that already have large gambling complexes. Several years ago, the Rumsey Band of Wintun Indians proposed tripling their Cache Creek Casino complex in the rural, largely agricultural Capay Valley outside Woodland and Davis in Yolo County. For years, the Capay Valley has been a leading supplier of healthy fruits and vegetables by small, independent growers, many of whom deliver organic produce to Bay Area farmers’ markets and restaurants.

Talks broke down after Supervisors concluded that the tribe’s environmental impact report (TEIR) was inadequate and at odds with the preservation of the rural character and agrarian economy of Yolo County. Among other concerns, Supervisors asked how the TEIR could project a 37-percent increase in traffic when the tribe’s complex would be expanded 300 percent. Yolo County Board of Supervisors Chair

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Helen Thomson stated “my main concern (is) the apparent neglect the Tribal EIR shows toward the expansion’s environmental impacts. It scratches the surface, then seemingly decides to leave well enough alone once a set amount of money is paid for specific county services” (Thomson 2009). (Note: The tribal operators of the

The heritage native prairie located within the project boundaries is labeled only as a weedy “annual grassland.”

Cache Creek Casino have joined the Point Molate casino development partnership and will provide initial financing for, and operation of, the estimated \$1 billion project [Brenneman 2009]. The recent recession led to withdrawal of Cache Creek expansion plans in Yolo County.)

Locally, some are asking why the Bay Area cannot instead assemble the region’s technical, academic, and managerial wealth into a forward-thinking economic development that can grow trained, diverse talent for the competitive, new global economy, while enhancing Point Molate’s quiet beauty at the same time.

In January 2010, the Richmond City Council is planning to decide the adequacy of the Draft EIR/EIS for Point Molate and the Bay Area. CNGA takes the position that the Draft EIR is not acceptable as a Final EIR due to informational inadequacies, particularly regarding the specific description of, impacts on, and possible mitigations to rare coastal prairie.

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GET INVOLVED: Readers are encouraged to research the major casino proposed for the natural area at Point Molate (soon) with the links provided and Web searches on the topic—and talk about what’s at stake here with everyone you know.

Send your comments to any of the decision-makers below. Short e-mails or twitters are fine.

- For Richmond City Council members, see [HTTP://WWW.CI.RICHMOND.CA.US/INDEX.ASPX?NID=29](http://WWW.CI.RICHMOND.CA.US/INDEX.ASPX?NID=29) for e-mail contact links.
- For the Interior Secretary, write to: The Honorable Kenneth Salazar, Secretary of the Interior, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street, N.W., Washington DC 20240; or access his e-mail link at [HTTP://WWW.DOI.GOV/CONTACT.HTML](http://WWW.DOI.GOV/CONTACT.HTML).
- For Senator Diane Feinstein, e-mail from: [HTTP://FEINSTEIN.SENATE.GOV/PUBLIC/](http://FEINSTEIN.SENATE.GOV/PUBLIC/).
- For Senator Barbara Boxer, e-mail from: [HTTP://BOXER.SENATE.GOV/](http://BOXER.SENATE.GOV/).
- California members of the House of Representatives are listed at: [HTTP://WWW.HOUSE.GOV/HOUSE/MEMBERWWW_BY_STATE.SHTML#CA](http://WWW.HOUSE.GOV/HOUSE/MEMBERWWW_BY_STATE.SHTML#CA).