



# The Pickleweed

The Newsletter of the Huntington Beach Wetlands Conservancy, Inc. (a Nonprofit Corporation)

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Our website has a new address: [www.hbwetlands.org](http://www.hbwetlands.org)

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## Report from the Front Lines: Fifth National Conference on Coastal and Estuarine Habitat Restoration

By Gordon Smith

This past November I had the privilege of representing the Huntington Beach Wetlands Conservancy at a national conference on coastal wetlands. Held in Galveston, the conference was sponsored by Restore America's Estuaries ([www.estuaries.org](http://www.estuaries.org)), a non-profit organization dedicated to "protecting and restoring the lands and waters essential to the richness and diversity of coastal life."

The three-day conference was attended by over 1,000 people representing government agencies at all levels, non-profit organizations such as ours, and more than 150 exhibitors selling all manner of products related to wetland restoration and management. It was truly gratifying to rub elbows with so many folks sharing the vital cause we all had in common.



*Restore America's Estuaries Conference*

While the overall theme of the conference was preparing for climate change, ten concurrent sessions involving 400-plus presenters shared current research and a wide

variety of wetlands restoration projects from all corners of the country. In addition, 160 poster sessions presented local wetlands projects.

Plenary session talks on national initiatives were particularly interesting. High-level officials from federal agencies such as NOAA, the Department of the Interior and the US Army Corps of Engineers discussed how the administration in Washington is setting a new agenda for coastal ecosystem restoration based on scientific research on climate change and coastal processes. The administration has adopted a new National Ocean Policy, and through executive order is creating a National Ocean Council to set priorities and to bring together and coordinate the efforts of 27 separate federal agencies. The goal is to implement a regional approach to coastal ecosystem restoration and management with funding made available through agencies such as NOAA.

The impact of climate change and sea level rise was on the minds of everyone at the conference, and a number of sessions were devoted to discussion of implications for coastal wetlands. Sea levels have already risen almost a foot in the last century, and many scientists believe they will rise several feet more by the end of this century as the oceans warm. Since the health and biological productivity of coastal wetlands depend on ocean tides rising and falling within a particular range, challenges of "adaptive management" will face organizations such as ours down the road.

I came away from the conference encouraged and energized by the hard work and dedication on display from my fellow conferees. But also I now more fully appreciate the daunting challenges ahead for all of us concerned about the long-term health of our fragile coastal ecosystem.

## Restoration Project Update

The final phase of restoration of the Magnolia Marsh - re-vegetation with native marsh and coastal sage plants - is well underway. Over 500 flats of various high marsh plants raised in our nursery are being planted along the

western edge of the marsh. Those plantings will be followed by the addition of coastal sage species in the areas of higher ground. Our native plant nursery will be kept busy raising the sage plants from seed and preparing them for planting.

Another project recently completed is a 200-foot extension of the sand dune next to Pacific Coast Highway. The dune extension will be vegetated with native plants appropriate for coastal sand dunes, and it will serve as a visual and sound buffer between the highway and our observation deck over the Magnolia Marsh.

Lastly, we are taking bids for construction of our first displays in our visitors' interpretive center. The center will ultimately embody the brilliant master plan crafted by the Acorn Group.

The design and the full Acorn report can be found at <http://hbwetlands.org/pdfs/Report06.17.08.pdf>.

### **Conservancy Appeals Environmental Review of Tank Farm Demolition**

Plains All American Pipeline, the company that owns the tank farm off Magnolia Street and just north of the Magnolia Marsh, is applying for a permit to demolish the oil storage tanks and sell the underlying land. The city's environmental review ignored the fact that two large above ground oil pipelines cross our Upper Magnolia marsh. Those pipelines will be useless without the tank farm, but Plains has refused to commit to removing them along with the tank farm.



*Oil Lines across Upper Magnolia Marsh*

In a March 8 public hearing on the environmental review, the Huntington Beach Planning Commission first voted to reject the review, then reversed course and voted to approve it following arguments presented by an assistant city attorney. The Conservancy disagrees with those arguments and is appealing the decision to the City

Council. The Conservancy's attorney and the staff counsel at the state Coastal Conservancy both believe the city should condition the demolition permit to include removal of the pipelines over our property. Leaving useless oil pipelines in place, even if they are purged and capped, will result in unnecessary blight and will prevent us from completing the restoration of the Upper Magnolia marsh.

### **Late Winter Cleaning Clears Massive Amounts of Litter and Debris**

On March 12, with the help of a group of 50 volunteers from the local LDS church, we pulled more than 60 large trash bags full of litter and debris from the Huntington Beach Wetlands. We collected every imaginable form of trash: plastic bottles and bottle caps, tennis balls, styrofoam in all shapes and sizes, scrap wood, plastic bags, aluminum cans, and even a highway warning marker. All of it had flowed into our wetlands via the two county flood channels that drain into our marshes.

Despite our efforts, much litter remains in the wetlands, mostly in the form of disintegrated plastic and styrofoam too small to collect. Those bits of junk will likely find their way into the ocean with the tides, and who knows how much stuff flowed directly into the ocean with the recent rains without getting caught in our three marshes.



*Results of March 12 Cleanup*

For over a year we have been asking the Orange County Flood Control District to help contain the trash and debris before it enters our wetlands. The Bolsa Chica wetlands are protected by a containment system in the Wintersburg flood channel. We can see no reason why the same systems cannot be installed in the Huntington and Talbert channels upstream from our wetlands.

Plastic debris in the ocean impacts the marine environment, and the courts have found LA County Flood Control District responsible for not protecting that environment. We think it's time for their OC counterparts



to own up to that responsibility as well.

### **Investigating Climate Change and Marsh Restoration**

*By Anastasia Shippey and Christine Whitcraft  
California State University Long Beach*

Remember the beginning of 2010? Think back to the dramatic start to winter with lots and lots of rain! During this rain, the restoration in Brookhurst Marsh was only 6 months old. Tidal influence had been restored in July of the previous summer, numerous plantings has been started on the bare areas, and now it was up to the marsh to continue the process to becoming more like a natural marsh. In Fall 2010, following the previous winter's rain events, a team of researchers resurveyed Brookhurst Marsh to learn more about the restoration progress. The marsh communities were progressing nicely with increased biodiversity of invertebrates and increases in algal biomass as compared to the pre-restoration state. Could this quick recovery be partially due to the higher precipitation the marsh experienced during the winter?

This question has become the focus of the most recent research project being conducted in the Huntington Beach Wetlands, specifically in Brookhurst Marsh. By focusing on one particular mechanism of recovery (increased precipitation), we can start to offer a bigger picture of what drives salt marsh recovery. In addition to providing information about driving factors, our research can help predict how restoration might occur with climate change. The temperature of both air and ocean water are expected to increase; this warming will be accompanied by changes in precipitation that are harder to predict. So, we are designing a manipulative experiment that will answer the question: how will these changes in climate affect the restoration of a local Southern California salt marsh?

A graduate student at CSU Long Beach will be addressing this question by testing the effects of increases in precipitation, decreases in precipitation, and increases in temperature on a newly planted section of Brookhurst Marsh. You will see some PVC structures near the middle of the marsh; each represents a small environmental chamber that can help alter temperature or precipitation. Throughout the Spring and Summer samples will be taken to look at changes in organisms (such as worms and snails), plant growth, important food sources, and soil characteristics. Information gained from this research will help us understand how to manage future restoration projects in the face of a changing climate.

### **Clapper Rail Recovery and the Conservancy**

For the past several years, the Conservancy has administered a fund for management and monitoring of

an endangered marsh bird species, the Light-footed Clapper Rail. Our board member Dick Zembal serves as manager of the fund and principal investigator for studies on the Clapper Rail throughout southern California.

The Conservancy has received funding from the California Department of Fish and Game, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Navy, and private donors to band captive-reared Clapper Rails prior to release in the wild, and to conduct follow-up observations in the wetlands of San Diego, Orange and Ventura counties. The Conservancy is partnering with the Chula Vista Nature Center, Sea World, and San Diego Zoo's Safari Park in these efforts.



*Light-footed Clapper Rail with Chick*

The Light-footed Clapper Rail is listed as endangered by both the federal and state governments, as loss and degradation of habitat in the increasingly urbanized Southern California environment threatens the existence of the species. The Conservancy is pleased to provide a home for the Clapper Rail recovery project and is expanding the efforts to cover other coastal species.

### **The Conservancy's First Audit**

*By Ann McCarthy, Treasurer*

This past year the Huntington Beach Wetlands Conservancy went through its first full audit. The Conservancy received Federal funds in the form of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) stimulus funds for the purpose of restoring Magnolia Marsh. Per Federal requirements, the amount of funds received in calendar 2009 required the completion of an audit. The audit was completed over the summer of 2010 and covered the period of calendar year 2009. The audit

was completed by HBLA Certified Public Accountants, Inc. with assistance from our accounting firm, Link Murrel & Company.

While we must admit we were a bit nervous having never been through an audit, we were also confident in our team and our programs. We are proud to report that the audit findings were minimal, especially for a first audit of an organization of our size and age.

The audit process included our audit firm becoming familiar with our organization and our policies and procedures. Our audit firm reviewed our 2009 financials and put together a list of materials they wanted to review, including items such as invoices, policies, and board meeting minutes.

At the end of the audit process a final report was issued. The findings included one material weakness and one significant deficiency. The material weakness reported was related to how properties purchased many years ago were reported on our balance sheet. Properties bought were not recorded on the books and depreciated properly. In response to this finding an adjustment was made to the financial statements. Additionally the Conservancy put

additional internal controls in place to assure properties are recorded properly in the future.

The significant deficiency reported was in regards to fixed assets that were purchased during the period and expensed rather than capitalized. In response to this finding a correcting adjustment was made to our financial statements and the Conservancy has put into place a formal fixed asset capitalization policy.

We, as the Board of Directors of the Conservancy, are very proud to have come through our first audit with minimal adjustments and findings. We are also positive that the additional internal controls and policies put in place will assure that the Conservancy's future financial statements will meet the highest possible standards.

**Our Board of Directors**

Gordon Smith, Chairperson	Dave Guido
Kristen Bender, Vice Chairperson	Jack Kirkorn
Bill Weisman, Secretary	Jim Robins
Ann McCarthy, Treasurer	Dick Zembal

**WE CAN ONLY RESTORE AND MAINTAIN THESE VITAL WETLANDS WITH YOUR CONTINUING SUPPORT**

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