July 2012
Candlestick Point State Recreation Area

Wetlands project completed
New wetlands at Candlestick Point State Recreation Area

San Francisco – The California Department of Parks and Recreation has announced completion of Phase I of the Yosemite Slough Wetlands Restoration Project at Candlestick Point State Recreation Area, nearly one year ahead of schedule. In May, workers installed irrigation systems and fencing to help ensure the establishment of new wetland plants. Final regulatory reports are due in July.

Key elements of the $14.3 million restoration included the removal of existing structures and debris on the north side of the Yosemite Slough canal as well as clean-up of contaminated soils, the creation of seven new acres of seasonal wetlands, and re-vegetation of the site with native plants to increase local biodiversity. Nearly a decade in the planning, the project has been a successful collaboration between public and private partners including the State Coastal Conservancy, the Wildlife Conservation Board, Bay Area Development Commission, the City of San Francisco, Bay Area Rapid Transit, the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Foundation, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 9 – San Francisco Bay Water Quality Improvement Fund/San Francisco Estuary Partnership, the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation, the San Francisco Foundation, the Barkley Fund and the California Department of Parks and Recreation.

The next phase of restoration will begin late July with construction of the north shoreline Bay Trail, expected to be completed by September.

For more information about the project, visit calparks.org/Candlestick.
In 2008, I was given the tremendous opportunity to oversee all of CSPF’s statewide programs and that included a wetlands restoration project located along the south shore of San Francisco. Since I am based in Los Angeles, the only thing I knew about “Candlestick” was that it was the first urban state park and that there was a football stadium nearby. In spite of this, or even perhaps because of it, I was very excited by the challenge ahead. I wanted to bring this project, which had been on the books for more than a decade, to fruition.

Work related to the Yosemite Slough project started the first day I assumed my new job overseeing CSPF programs – contracts, contracts and more contracts. So I began by doing the obvious – I visited the park and toured the area, met with funders and experts, and tried to learn the lay of the land. As I stood along the edge of the Slough and looked beyond the weedy and trash-covered shoreline to see its sheer beauty, I understood why community members had urged CSPF to stick with this project for so many years. I also understood why groups like Literacy for Environmental Justice, which has been one of our most important community partners, have fought for its clean up and preservation.

I became familiar with developer Lennar Urban’s plans to create a major development surrounding the Yosemite Slough project including a desire to build a bridge across the mouth of the Slough in order to facilitate easy access to a proposed, new football stadium. Concerned about the impact of the bridge on our restoration project, CSPF and Lennar entered into discussions, then later negotiations and finally a successful agreement, on the design criteria and cooperative process for creating a bridge that would respect both the environmental restoration of the area, and public access for recreation, wildlife-viewing and transportation.

By early 2011, we were finally ready to go. The permitting was done, the construction drawings and final budget prepared and approved, and the job was bid out by the landowner, the California Department of Parks and Recreation. By summer, construction was underway. About half way through, a group of us took a tour of the site. Elizabeth Goldstein, president of CSPF, Cecille Caterson, CSPF program manager in charge of the project, and I met up with Gary Smith, project manager for the Department of Parks and Recreation, and George Salvaggio, WRA landscape architect and consultant team lead. With our hardhats in place, we ventured out into the half-finished site. It was unrecognizable. Gone were the weeds, the concrete blocks, the dilapidated buildings. Gone was the rough terrain, replaced by a smooth expanse of land edged by a berm holding back the waters of the Slough (temporarily – the berm was breached just days later, creating the wetlands). A beautiful oval bird island had been carved out and sat expectantly waiting for avian life to descend on their way across the San Francisco Bay. It was a revelatory experience for all of us as we surveyed the results of our many years of effort to create the largest contiguous wetland area in the County of San Francisco. - an area of the bay where tidal wetlands have been most impacted and suffered the greatest loss due to urbanization.

For me personally, the steep learning curve that I encountered taking on this project was more than worth the sense of personal accomplishment I feel at all of the knowledge and skills I have acquired. I can now talk soil characterization with ease at parties... I intend to put all of this knowledge to good use on the next phase of the project, restoring the wetlands on the south side of the Slough. I look forward to the day when I can stand at the mouth of the Slough and see a wetlands restoration fully complete, with an interpretive center, an amphitheatre, walking paths, nesting birds and verdant wetlands!

Sara Feldman is Vice President of Programs for the California State Parks Foundation.
Cecille Caterson: In January, you were appointed Acting District Superintendent of the Diablo Vista District. Do you remember when you first fell in love with being in the outdoors and knew that you wanted to have a career where you could share this excitement with others?

Danita Rodriguez: I started my State Parks career 35 years ago as a seasonal park aide working in the kiosk at Silverwood Lake State Recreation Area in San Bernardino County. I grew up loving the outdoors while my parents took us five kids on a lot of camping trips. Although my career goal at the time did not include becoming a ranger, working that first season at Silverwood Lake and volunteering to assist with Junior Ranger programs got me hooked and convinced me that working for State Parks was something I really needed to pursue. I’ve had assignments in Santa Barbara, Lake Tahoe, Humboldt Redwoods State Park, and now Marin.

CC: Your park district covers state parks in Marin, Sonoma and San Francisco counties. How would you describe the unique characteristics of these parks and particularly CPSRA?

DR: There are nine counties between the Marin and Diablo Vista Districts. Each of the 24 parks in these two districts is quite distinct and diverse. For instance, Marconi Conference Center State Historic Park near Tomales Bay is so different from Annandale SP nestled up in the hills in Sonoma County which is then again completely unique from Samuel P. Taylor SP surrounded by redwood forest habitat in West Marin. And none of these parks is anything at all like Candlestick Point SRA, in the middle of San Francisco and the first urban State Park in our system, except that they are each very well loved by the local communities they serve.

CC: You are about to celebrate the completion of Phase I, North Side of the Yosemite Slough Wetlands Restoration. What are future plans for CPSRA?

DR: Governor Brown has provided temporary funding for the majority of the state parks that were on the closure list, including CPSRA, so the park will stay open. But the funding is not permanent and we are still working with CSPF and other community partners to help find an equitable solution to keeping the park open long term. The Bay Trail along the north shoreline of Yosemite Slough is the next work to be done. Workers should break ground for that in late July. Construction drawings and additional site characterization for Phase II, South Side, will be completed by the end of the year. We hope to break ground once the full funding has been raised. Plans to implement the new General Plan for the park will begin to unfold over the next several years.

CC: You have always been a strong supporter of youth enrichment programs that get kids outdoors. Do you have any long-range plans that will focus on the unique educational features of CPSRA? Are they guided by a particular vision?

DR: There are a number of opportunities at CPSRA for youth. First, our partner, Literacy for Environmental Justice, offers programs in the community garden and greenhouse that promote park stewardship. I am very excited that the next phase of the Yosemite Slough Wetlands Restoration will include a new Interpretive Center overlooking the north shore of the Slough and will be used as a gathering place for a number of programs, many focusing on youth. CSPF and DPR were very fortunate to obtain funding from the State Coastal Conservancy for this welcome addition. One of the facility improvements for the park in the new General Plan also includes a kayak launching area and campground.

My job as a District Park Superintendent is to find ways to promote the inner connectedness between parks, nature, and cities. CPSRA serves an important role in providing open space in a highly urbanized area. People in the neighborhood can go to the park to hike, fish, or even take their kids to a safe place where they can learn to ride a bike. I know that the park makes a difference in this community and look forward to seeing future park improvements take shape.

Danita Rodriguez is the Acting District Superintendent for the Diablo Vista District, California State Parks.
Volunteers Reverse Destruction Caused by Vandals by Cleaning Up Candlestick Community Garden

In April, vandals broke into the community garden at Candlestick Point State Recreation Area, operated by nonprofit group Literacy for Environmental Justice, and destroyed thousands of native plants, including some that had been growing for years. The plants were to be planted in nearby Yosemite Slough as part of the wetlands restoration project. The vandals also destroyed gardening tools used by volunteers. The damage reversed much of the work completed at an Earth Day cleanup just a week earlier.

Park heroes were quick to step forward – thanks to PG&E which donated funds for a new fence to secure the garden and help prevent further vandalism, Save the Bay which provided 1,000 wetland seedlings to replenish lost plant stock, San Francisco Bay Joint Venture which helped with new potting materials, and the many community volunteers who donated their time to help out, the garden is once again thriving. The new wetland plants will be ready to go into the ground this fall.