

Supervisor John Gioia's Weekly eUpdate

April 27, 2010

Supervisor Gioia testifies before Congress to increase funding for San Francisco Bay

The San Francisco Bay is a cherished natural treasure that defines the quality of life for those of us who live in the Bay Area.

This Wednesday, April 28, I'll be testifying before the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment to explain to lawmakers the national importance of the Bay and the reasons why the Federal government should invest \$1 billion to restore the San Francisco Bay and Estuary.

I am honored to be one of three representatives from the Bay Area who have been invited to speak before a Congressional panel about "Protecting and Restoring America's Great Waters, Part II: The Columbia River and San Francisco Bay."

I will be joined by Judy Kelly, Director of the San Francisco Estuary Project, and Jim Wunderman, CEO of the Bay Area Council.

Recently, Bay Area Congresswoman Jackie Speier, with support from all other Bay Area members of Congress, introduced H.R. 5061, the "San Francisco Bay Improvement Act of 2010." The bill would authorize an unprecedented \$100 million annually for 10 years to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to fund projects, programs and studies to restore San Francisco Bay. Wetlands restoration and pollution control projects would be eligible for this funding. It would also establish a special SF Bay Program Office within the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

A copy of my testimony is available on my website at www.cocobos.org/gioia.

I also invite you to watch the webcast live on Wednesday as we testify before Congress.

Webcast Date/Time:

Wednesday, April 28, 2010
11:00 a.m. (Pacific Time)

Website addresses:

<http://transportation.house.gov>

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House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
Water Resources and Environment Subcommittee
Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

TESTIMONY OF JOHN GIOIA

Chair, Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors
Vice Chair of the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority
Member, Bay Conservation and Development Commission
Executive Board Member, Association of Bay Area Governments
Secretary, Bay Area Air Quality Management District

Madam Chairwoman, Members of the Subcommittee, good afternoon.

My name is John Gioia. I'm here today to testify from the perspective of regional and local governments in the San Francisco Bay Area about the great need for increased federal investment in the San Francisco Bay. I am the Chair of the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors and also serve on a number of state and regional commissions which set policy for the Bay Area. I am the Vice Chair of the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority, the Secretary of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and also serve on the Bay Conservation and Development Commission and the Executive Board of the Association of Bay Area Governments. I also formerly served for 10 years on the East Bay Municipal Utility District Board of Directors, one of the largest water and wastewater agencies in California.

San Francisco Bay is the defining geography of Northern California. It supports our economy and its health greatly impacts the quality of life for our region. It is the equivalent of a national park in our front yard – a resource and a treasure.

The restoration of San Francisco Bay is of national importance and warrants substantial Federal investment. It is a key component for the protection and enhancement of the west coast fishery..

The Golden Gate entrance to the Bay is a gateway to world trade and one of the most important ports on the West Coast. Goods transported between Bay Area ports and points around the globe originate from or are transported to communities around the country, and are shipped by train, truck, or air, benefiting economies nationwide. The health of San Francisco Bay helps drive the Bay Area economy, which in turn impacts the national economy. According to 2010 data, the Bay

Area is home to 3,475,840 jobs. These jobs contribute greatly to the economic vitality of our nation.

While San Francisco Bay benefits local, regional, and national economies, local governments are increasingly bearing the primary costs of stewardship. This includes the costs of restoration and of protecting and maintaining the Bay's health.

The San Francisco Bay and Delta make up the largest estuary on the west coast of North and South America and its watershed area drains over half the state of California. One of the biggest challenges to maintaining the Bay's health is the fact that it is the most urbanized estuary in the United States.

According to the most recent estimates by the Association of Bay Area Governments, 7,341,700 people live in the 101 cities and nine counties of the Bay Area, and approximately half of this population lives within five miles of the Bay. And they all live uphill from the Bay – which means that what flows off our roads, parking lots, farms and lawns, including all the contaminants, ends up in the Bay.

Historically, cities grew and developed along the Bay and its many creek-lined watersheds, as people and industry were drawn to water resources, beauty, and recreation. Unfortunately, in a story played out in shoreline communities around the country, our knowledge of the fragility of water ecosystems didn't keep pace with development, and as the Bay Area grew, the San Francisco Estuary suffered. Years of filling the Bay, industrial pollution, poor or no sewage treatment, polluted stormwater runoff, and shoreline garbage dumps all took a devastating toll on water and wetlands quality, which in turn negatively affected wildlife, air quality, public health, and recreational opportunities. The economic value of the Bay was eroding.

The good news is that over the past few decades, local governments in the San Francisco Bay Area, working with citizen and environmental groups, have taken proactive steps to reverse this steady decline in the ecological health of the Bay. They set in motion a comprehensive planning effort to improve the health and vitality of the Bay, which includes substantial investments in infrastructure to carry this out.

POLLUTION CONTROL EFFORTS

Cities and counties as well as water, sewer, stormwater and flood control agencies surrounding the Bay maintain the highest standards of pollution control in the nation. Citizens hold the Bay dear to their hearts and are willing to do what it takes to protect it. But today, we find that we are unable to meet our own protective standards due to the deterioration of an aged infrastructure system in the face of a growing population and declining revenues. The costs to improve this system are well beyond the ability of local agencies.

For example, just in the area of sewage treatment, Bay Area wastewater agencies have invested well over \$10 billion in plant upgrades since the passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972. But due to the combination of declining federal and state funding, an aging infrastructure, and population growth, it will become increasingly difficult for the 46 sewage treatment plants along the Bay (including an aging collection system of more than 10,000 miles of pipe) to maintain their high water quality standards.

As a region, we face substantial costs to upgrade our wastewater collection and treatment systems to insure prevention of sewage overflows that further damage the Bay. In recent years, overflows have become more frequent as a result of the aging system. Upgrades are also needed to keep pace with our rigorous water quality standards.

We need to expand the use of recycled water both to reduce discharges to the Bay and to reduce demand on over-drafted surface and groundwater supplies. To accomplish this, we need to upgrade regional treatment plants and build new distribution networks to replace the wasteful use of potable water with recycled water wherever possible.

The even bigger problem is stormwater runoff, which is the largest contributor to Bay pollution, and the most difficult to manage. Untreated stormwater runs into the Bay from streets, gutters, creeks and drainage systems, bringing a variety of pollutants from trash to chemicals.

In addition to runoff from communities in the nine-county Bay Area, urban and agricultural runoff from California's vast Central Valley ultimately reaches the Bay, and has very minimal levels of control.

Bay Area communities are aggressively tackling the problem of stormwater runoff, or non-point pollution with recycling programs, public education campaigns, and lobbying to regulate sources of pollution such as the use of plastic shopping bags or foam food containers. We are using contemporary strategies, including “Low Impact Development”, including the reduction of impermeable surfaces in order to decrease runoff to the Bay.

City and county stormwater management programs are seeking to address these issues, but face a major financing obstacle. Most Bay Area stormwater management isn't covered by a fee or rate program, like wastewater treatment. Agencies cover the costs without a mechanism for collecting fees from property owners.

Under California law, local governments need a two-thirds vote of the people, or a majority of the property owners to start a rate or fee based stormwater management program, or to raise fees or taxes to improve existing systems. As a result, management of stormwater quality is significantly underfunded.

Consequently, the region is spending the least amount of money on one of the biggest problems and there is no hope in sight that this will be corrected.

Let me make this point very clear – Bay Area voters will be more likely to approve local tax increases to fund needed improvements if they know that increased local dollars will leverage federal monies and investment.

REGIONAL COOPERATION TO SOLVE PROBLEMS AFFECTING THE BAY

Local and regional agencies in the Bay Area are working cooperatively to solve our region's problems. We are tackling transportation, air and water quality, and land use issues on a regional level. All of these issues impact the health of San Francisco Bay. Federal assistance to support our efforts will leverage greater local dollars to sustain these initiatives.

Let me mention a few examples of some of our regional efforts.

Bay Area leaders recognized years ago that land use planning has enormous impacts on water and air quality. As a result, the Association of Bay Area Governments has led a regional effort to focus on infill development. By encouraging development in areas where there is access to transit, jobs and utility capacity, there will be less sprawl, less commute travel, more efficient utility

service and improved air and water quality. This region-wide effort has led to the identification of “Priority Development Areas” with economic incentives for development in these areas.

In addition, land use planning in the Bay Area is being increasingly focused on the watershed unit in order to take advantage of the benefits to local communities that are provided naturally by the ecological functions that the Bay and its tributaries perform. Local governments in the Bay Area are improving land use planning and the sustainability of their communities by tailoring our plans to the particular features of the San Francisco Bay watershed. This watershed planning approach promotes both healthier communities and a healthier Bay.

The Bay Conservation and Development Commission has established a Climate Change Planning Program. The goals of this program are to: 1) identify and report on the impacts of climate change on the Bay, 2) identify strategies for adapting to climate change, and 3) develop a regional task force to inform and coordinate local governments, stakeholders, and land use planning bodies in the Bay Area regarding the potential Bay-related impacts of and approaches for adapting to global climate change.

The Regional Water Quality Control Board recently issued a new and highly progressive stormwater permit to Bay Area counties. The permit uses a regional approach to several water quality issues.

Bay Area flood protection agencies are protecting our communities from flooding while also preserving and enhancing riparian corridors.

Communities around San Francisco Bay have been working collaboratively with the Regional Water Quality Control Board, Bay Conservation and Development Commission, well-respected non profits, and universities on a variety of scientific endeavors to improve the health of the Bay. These efforts have resulted in developing a Bayland Goals report and Historical Ecology reports on several watershed areas that help direct investment in wetland and riparian system restoration. More research is still needed to develop cost effective methods for communities to implement these strategies.

Finally, and probably most exciting, is the establishment of the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority, which is a new regional government agency charged with rebuilding San Francisco Bay through the raising and granting of funds to restore the Bay’s critical tidal wetlands. Today, over 36,000 acres of restorable Bay

shoreline is in public ownership and proposed for restoration to tidal wetlands. Restoring these 36,000 acres is estimated to cost up to \$1.4 billion over 50 years. While there is identified Federal and State funding available to complete some of this massive project, the Authority's mission is to formulate a strategy for raising local revenues to fill the funding gap. Additional Federal investment in this effort would greatly enhance the Authority's ability to get local voters to support funding this vital project.

Wetlands play a central role in the battle against global warming, and scientists from the United Nations and the White House have identified wetland restoration as a priority strategy in fighting global warming. In addition, the wetland restoration envisioned in this project will be an important benefit to Bay-related industry and the regional economy.

In conclusion, the San Francisco Bay Area is on the verge of implementing a successful plan to restore our treasured estuary. We have a Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan, strong regional leadership on this issue, a history of successful collaboration among local, regional and state policymakers and active citizen groups, and we have the commitment and expertise to carry this out. All we need is a strengthened partnership with the Federal Government along with an increased investment and we will be able to make great strides in improving the health of this critically important estuary for the region, the nation and the world to enjoy for generations to come.

Thank you for the chance to testify before you today.