

YES on AA

CLEAN AND HEALTHY BAY

Vote YES on Measure AA
For a Clean and Healthy San Francisco Bay

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EDITORIAL

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TAX TO HELP PROTECT SAN FRANCISCO BAY FROM SEA LEVEL RISE IS NEEDED

We're fortunate that environmentalists three decades ago stopped the filling of San Francisco Bay. Now, as we face rising sea levels due to global warming, we need to take the next step by restoring wetlands destroyed over more than a century.

That's why Bay Area voters in June should back Measure AA, a nine-county, \$12-per-parcel annual tax to raise some of the funds needed for restoration before the wetlands are forever lost.

Wetlands provide natural flood protection by breaking up wave energy. Unfortunately, between the 1849 Gold Rush and the 1980s, about one-third of the bay was filled. The tidal marsh, once about 200,000 acres, has been reduced to about 44,000 today.

Meanwhile, the water level in the bay is expected to rise 1 foot in the next 20 years, 2 feet by 2050 and up to 5 feet by 2100, according to the National Academy of Sciences.

That threatens highways, airports, homes and office buildings along the shoreline. We need to get moving.

The proposed tax would raise an estimated \$500 million over its 20-year life, a fraction of what's needed, but a good seed-money fund to attract state, federal and private-sector contributions.

It would be administered by the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority, an agency created by state law in 2008 to restore wetlands and wildlife habitat

in the bay and along the shoreline. It has a seven-member board appointed by the Association of Bay Area Governments but no funding to carry out its mission. That's where the tax comes in.

Each parcel would be levied the same \$12 annually, regardless of its size or proximity to the bay. In an ideal world, property owners would pay in proportion to the direct benefits they receive. But the entire region will be seriously affected by a rising bay in job losses and high public costs, so it is in all our interests to get started on this work.

There's also a practical reason to keep this tax simple. Calculating relative values for a direct-benefit assessment would be extremely complicated and costly. So would processing the tax each year. The simple tax, which requires two-thirds approval across the nine counties, will be easier for voters to understand. Given the modest amount raised, we're not inclined to press for a more costly allocation system.

That said, some major companies that have built in low-lying areas, especially Silicon Valley firms like Facebook, Google and Cisco Systems, face substantial threats and stand to benefit greatly from wetlands restoration. They need to step up with meaningful contributions to the restoration. Merely underwriting a political campaign for a tax largely paid by others doesn't cut it.

We're happy to urge voter support for Measure AA. But that should be just the start.

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