



Editorial: Vote 'yes' on Measure AA, Bay restoration parcel tax

What can be done with a mere \$12 paid annually by each property owner in the region surrounding San Francisco Bay? When the region in question comprises nine counties and the cumulative payments equal \$500 million over 20 years, the answer is obvious: a whole lot.

Voters in those nine counties -- including San Mateo County -- are being asked to approve Measure AA on the June 7 ballot, a \$12-per-parcel tax to raise money to pay for vital work: the restoration of San Francisco Bay shorelines to functioning tidal marshes. The projects planned by the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority would do more than improve public access to the Bay for enhanced recreational purposes; they would also fortify and expand wildlife habitat and create an effective flood protection system -- an urgent need given the perils of sea-level rise predicted in coming decades.

The measure needs approval by two-thirds of the voters for passage. If passed, the tax would raise about \$25 million per year for two decades. Counties would be divided into four regions, with San Mateo and San Francisco counties forming the West Bay region. Funding would be allocated based on population, and half of the \$500 million would be divvied up among the four regions. The West Bay region can expect some \$55 million for its shoreline projects.

The other half of the tax revenues would fund high-priority projects identified by the Authority's governing board.

A significant selling point for the measure is that the Authority and regional administrators will be able to leverage tax revenue to generate matching funds from the state and the federal government, according to county Supervisor Dave Pine, who chairs the Authority's governing board.

Local projects that are likely to be funded through Measure AA include the SAFER Bay Project, an effort launched by the San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority to focus on South San Mateo County areas threatened by sea-level rise. Measure AA revenue would likely fund the planned Ravenswood Slough marsh-restoration and levee-improvement project. That area is adjacent to Bedwell Park in Menlo Park.

Projects planned over all four regions to benefit from the tax would also focus on improving water quality by tackling longstanding trash- and toxin-pollution problems in the Bay and restoring wetlands, which provide natural filters that continually remove pollution from the water.

This tax measure makes sense. The San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority has worked since 2008 to identify solutions to the complicated network of problems facing the Bay and the communities surrounding it. Property owners are being asked to contribute only \$12 a year to pay for remedies to those problems. We will pay a far higher price in the future if we choose not to pay a nominal tax now.