

## Interview

# John McCaull

## National Audubon Society

*The NELC settlement with Shell Oil will fund 24 environmental projects dedicated to the preservation of the San Francisco Bay ecosystem. NELC spoke with John McCaull, the California Legislative Director for the National Audubon Society, about one such project—an Audubon Society initiative to educate the public about the need to preserve Bay area wetlands.*

**Why is wetlands preservation in the San Francisco Bay area so important and how will Audubon's project address the issue?**

Our project's focus is to use the eight Bay area Audubon chapters to educate the public in a coordinated way about selenium pollution, mercury pollution and other pollutants and how wetlands serve as natural filtration systems for Bay waters.

Over the last 25 years, the wetlands system around the Bay has been fragmented by development. There is a tremendous need for enhancement and restoration of the wetlands that remain. The most important aspect of this is educating people to the fact that the small portion of wetland near them is important to the overall health of the Bay.

**How will Audubon's project meet that goal?**

Our goal is to hire a media coordinator, who will

draw attention to the various local interest stories—kids restoring wetlands, planting trees . . . success stories.

We'll also make sure that people know that laws like the Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act are vital to the health of Bay wetlands and Bay waters. Additionally, the coordinator will work with members of the local chapters to train them on how to work with their local papers, TV stations, and other media.

There's definitely an ethic of protection for San Francisco Bay among the local media. But what most people don't recognize is that the Bay and surrounding delta are a unit. Through our project, we're going to make that connection.

**What long-term impact do you see your project having on San Francisco Bay?**

Our hope is to foster a regional perspective—to get people to think beyond their own town, creek or river and understand that you can't take pieces out of a puzzle and expect it to still work.

So, first we'd like to foster increased local activism around restoration of wetlands and riparian areas. Second, our hope is that, even after the funding for the project is exhausted, a whole group of people

will have obtained public outreach and education skills that they can use to help preserve the Bay.

**A total of 24 groups are receiving funding from the Shell settlement. Will the groups work together?**

Each of us is obviously going to go our own way, but I hope we (the Audubon Society) can integrate our efforts with those of the other groups, especially those working on wetlands restoration projects. We have a long history of doing that already and we've got to make sure there's coordination.

**What is your view of the importance of citizen lawsuits, such as NELC's lawsuit against Shell, in improving the health of waterways like the Bay?**

Audubon has been involved, at both the national and local levels, in litigation under the citizen suit provisions of various environmental laws. The power of citizen litigators is important because state and federal regulators would never take action against a company like Shell.

To me, citizen enforcement is the most important hammer. All the good will in the world won't get you a clean San Francisco Bay. Anything we can do to strengthen citizen enforcement is important. ♦

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