CREEKS & RIVERS

The San Francisco Bay watershed begins in the Sierra Nevada Mountains and ends at the Golden Gate. Connecting these two is a vast network of creeks, rivers, and wetlands. While providing wildlife habitat and fantastic places to recreate, these waterways and open lands also provide important ecosystem services that include filtering pollutants, reducing flood hazards, sequestering carbon, and recharging groundwater supplies.

SHORELINE & OPEN BAY

The beautiful shoreline and open water of the San Francisco Bay gives the Bay Area its iconic identity, contributing to the quality of life for over 7.5 million residents and drawing visitors from all over the world. But the Bay is more than just a scenic backdrop—below the surface, waters nourish diverse habitats including eelgrass, mudflats, and oyster reefs. These habitats, sustained by nutrients from marine and freshwater systems, create a rich environment critical to a wide variety of species for feeding, shelter, and reproduction. Harbor seals, cormorants, leopard sharks, and Chinook salmon, along with over 380 species of fish and wildlife, live in or pass through this open water habitat during their life cycles.

MARBES & SLOUGHS

These transition zones of salty and fresh water are home to tidal marshes that harbor an abundance of species. Established marshes are characterized by snaking channels and sloughs winding through habitat dominated by pycnogonum and pickleweed—plants specially adapted to survive in salty water. Marshes are rich habitats that provide critical winter feeding grounds for over a million migratory birds, a nursery for young fish and crabs, and a full-time home for many others. Throughout the Bay, most of the historic tidal marshlands have been filled in or isolated from the Bay’s waters by levees and converted for industry, farms, or salt production. Through habitat restoration, many of these former baylands are being returned to the hands of the tide. Wetlands reform from levee breaches, in managed ponds and marshes that have been disconnected from the tides, have shown speedy recovery rates. These recovering wetlands provide important habitat for wildlife and ideal opportunities for exploration by bay- goers, canoers, or paddleboarders.

Creeks and rivers form a network that many species rely on to migrate between upland habitats and the Bay, including river and estuarine wetland overland travel. Restoring creeks and rivers to their natural form and function supports threatened species and will increase the resilience of our region to climate change.

Go Bembridge Island Redwood Creek has salmon runs plentiful in the 1990s that local students could catch them by hand from the small streams of creek that run by campus. Despite extensive urbanization of the wetland, a small population of steelhead remains in the creek today. Organizations like the North Bay Watershed Association are working with local partners to improve the water quality of these streams so they may return again in the future.

WILDLIFE ETHICS

Pay Attention to Behavior

Pay attention to signs that all wildlife are feeding, breeding, courting, or rearing you, and follow them if you notice these behaviors are you are near and should quickly back away.

Stay at a Constant Speed

Avoid paddling directly at wildlife. When possible, approach on a diagonal course and speed, and avoid sudden stops or changes in direction that may startle or overwhelm the species.

Plan Your Trip to Avoid Disturbing Habitats

Avoid nesting colonies, rookeries, and haul-out and roost sites where vulnerable species are located. Only land in designated areas and respect the closures and wildlife buffer distances.