

## **Long Beach Press-Telegram**

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### **Restoring wetlands**

Funding: State bonds are available source.

The status report from last week's wetlands symposium in Long Beach was somber: A century of aggressive development has laid waste to all but 5 percent of Southern California's natural salt marshes and estuaries.

But the mood of the conference wasn't dreary. Rather, there was tremendous enthusiasm born of the hope and real possibility that some lost wetlands will soon be restored and reborn.

Long Beach, in particular, appears poised to embrace a growing national trend toward wetlands restoration. The city has significant public and political support at a time when hundreds of millions in state bond money has been set aside for wetlands restoration. Meanwhile, at least one wetland area qualifies for millions in mitigation funds from the Port of Long Beach.

Wetlands restoration and preservation has three distinct benefits. The first is pollution control. Wetlands intercept storm runoff and act as powerful, low-cost pollution filters, limiting the harmful toxins that reach ocean water. Urban runoff is Long Beach's No. 1 source of ocean pollution.

Wetlands also provide feeding and breeding grounds for a wide variety of wildlife, including many endangered and threatened species. The dense flora of wetlands offers the protection from predators that some species require to reach maturity.

Finally, wetlands restoration enhance parkland, open space, recreational and educational opportunities in highly developed urban areas like Long Beach.

City officials have identified about 10 sites for wetland restoration. The plans are still somewhat general, though, as there is no set time frame or cash on hand with which to get started.

But there are money sources, notably state bonds. And before they evaporate, the city should make a serious effort to secure as much restoration funding as possible.

The Los Cerritos Wetlands, if all the pieces fall into place, could become Southern California's premiere example of wetlands restoration. The nearly 300-acre site has been spared from development through oil production, but much of the land has been degraded. Purchase negotiations are underway.

Other potential restoration sites in Long Beach include five along the L.A. River, the Colorado Lagoon, and three areas in East Long Beach near El Dorado Park.

Wetlands restoration is an expensive, difficult undertaking. Encouragingly, the necessary forces science, money, political will and public support are coming together to make it happen.

