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July 14, 2004

Judge H. Craig Manson  
Assistant Secretary  
Fish, Wildlife and Parks  
1849 C Street, NW, Room 3156  
Washington, DC 20240

Re: Bair Island

Dear Judge Manson:

I am writing to you on behalf of the City of Redwood City to ask for your assistance in furthering the efforts to restore Bair Island, a portion of the Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge. While the City has been actively involved in working with the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) and other stakeholders throughout the lengthy planning process, critical issues have now developed that are extremely time sensitive for the City and for the future of the refuge. I hope that you will be able to provide the guidance and support for our local efforts to benefit this project as it moves forward.

### **Background**

The City of Redwood City believes it is in a unique position to become a major partner with the NWRS in the restoration of Bair Island. Bair Island and its 323 acres of open space was acquired by the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST) in 1997 and then subsequently deeded to the Don Edwards National Wildlife Refuge. In the ensuing years a plan has been developed by the NWRS and an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) with a preferred alternative for restoration is awaiting release in the Federal Register for the purpose of eliciting public comment.

Redwood City sees a unique opportunity to forge a mutually beneficial partnership with the Refuge that will enhance and expand the restoration plan to benefit all stakeholders. These stakeholders include the environmental community, the residents of both Redwood City and the greater Bay Area community, the NWRS and the National Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS). The objectives of these varied groups can be condensed to one very powerful statement, "to preserve and protect what can possibly become the largest, urban wildlife refuge in the western United States."

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Redwood City and its elected officials believe in the importance of this resource so much that the City has hired its own consultant, Perkins Coie, and even developed its own restoration plan. It is the City's hope that it will be a model for future generations, setting a standard that looks to respect the environment while respecting those who want to appreciate and embrace wildlife in a truly urban setting. Redwood City is an urban setting. Redwood City has a population of approximately 78,000 residents living in diverse neighborhoods. One of the largest neighborhoods in Redwood City is Redwood Shores with just over 12,000 residents. Redwood Shores first developed on bay fill in the 1960's and is protected from inter-tidal San Francisco Bay inundation by a complex levee system.

In 1999/2000 the Army Corp. of Engineers determined that a levee height increase was necessary to protect the Redwood Shores community. This levee system was used by residents to walk, bike and run along the Bay. The Army Corps of Engineers entered into informal consultation pursuant to the Endangered Species Act, because of the possibility that this human traffic could affect the habitat of two endangered species, the California clapper rail and the salt marsh harvest mouse. The biological opinion rendered by the FWS eliminated any use of the levee for citizen use. The habitat for these two endangered species was viewed in isolation from the rest of Bair Island that is located directly south across Steinberger Slough from the Redwood Shores Levee System. This viewing of the problem in isolation led to the closure of the pedestrian pathways and caused severe injury to public enjoyment of San Francisco Bay.

Redwood City, through much time, energy and resources, has looked at the complex problem in its entirety and believes it has a strong case for a viable and long term solution to both the restoration of Bair Island and the re-opening of the Redwood Shores Levee System for public use. By working to restore Bair Island, a new and far more extensive habitat for the clapper rail and salt marsh harvest mouse can be developed. A legacy can be created for environmental education and community collaboration for many years to come. In addition to habitat protection and development for these endangered species, Redwood City sees the following goals as tantamount to its plan:

- to educate regional citizens and visitors to refuges and conservation values as they relate to an urban setting;
- to create a unique educational tool for Bay area students to learn varied aspects of estuarial lifecycles, ecological design and environmental principles;
- to provide opportunities for handicapped persons, seniors and other sub-populations to use and enjoy the refuge in a manner consistent with the refuge mission;
- to form a working partnership with the NWRs and FWS for the long-term security of the refuge and the endangered species; and
- to fulfill long-standing local and regional goals for public access and involvement with nature and the ecological history of California

### **Critical time sensitive issues**

Redwood City has several critical economic as well as health and safety issues that it believes could produce long-term detrimental effects if there are further delays in the process. The Port of Redwood City has been prohibited from adequately dredging its channel due to the environmental and safety concerns of the levee system. Lack of adequate dredging results in higher costs and limits the loads container ships can bring into the Port.

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If the Port could be adequately dredged, the dredge spoils could be used as part of the restoration project, in addition to allowing the Port its full economic capacity. This is an additional financial threat in a time of economic difficulty in the region.

The South Bayside System Authority (SBSA) has its sewage treatment plant at the far end of Redwood Shores across from Bair Island and needs the levee system maintained to protect its primary force main. By not allowing regular maintenance and access to the levee system, potential long-term health and safety concerns become an issue. The recent dike failures in California has heightened these concerns about the safety of the levees, since there has been virtually no maintenance done on them since the purchase of the property for conservation purposes. Additionally, the San Carlos Airport has a safety zone that is located within the refuge and there are concerns that this could be compromised without needed maintenance.

The refuge is also impacted by the dredging issue. The easy access of local dredge spoils from the Port could have a dramatic impact on the cost of providing the necessary spoils to assist with the refuge plans. Lengthy delays increase the potential for flooding and potential damage to sensitive habitat.

Based on the above outlined goals, economic, health and safety issues, Redwood City strongly encourages you to provide the guidance needed to move this project forward, to review the City plan and support the efforts it is making towards conservation, collaboration and communication. I would be happy to discuss this in more detail at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeff Ira", written in a cursive style.

Jeff Ira, Mayor  
City of Redwood City

Cc: David Smith, Deputy Assistant Secretary Fish Wildlife and Parks,  
Buzz Fawcett, Perkins Coie