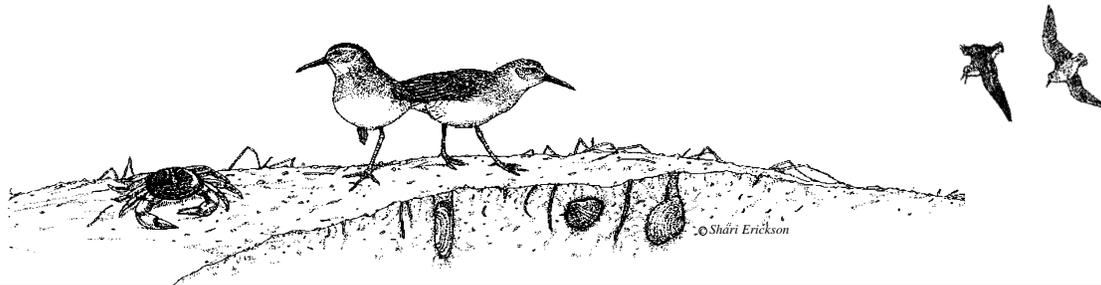




SAN DIEGO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Planning Update



UPDATE #5

NOVEMBER 1997

WHAT'S NEW

The draft environmental assessment and land protection plan for the proposed addition of the South San Diego Bay Unit to the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge will be available in late fall. This planning update briefly describes the wildlife and habitats of South Bay, summarizes the alternatives analyzed in the environmental assessment, and explains how to stay involved in the planning process.

HELP US PLAN THE PROPOSED SOUTH SAN DIEGO BAY UNIT

Your interests, concerns, and comments regarding the proposed refuge unit will be considered in the development of the final environmental assessment and land protection plan. To give you a chance to ask questions and make comments in person, we will be holding open houses after the draft documents are released. When dates and locations are firm, we will send you another update with details.

Unless we hear from you, your name will remain on the mailing list for all future updates and environmental documents. If your address changes or you would like to add or delete an address, please call (800) 662-8933 or send us an e-mail message at r1planning_guest@fws.gov (please type "South San Diego Bay" in the subject line).

A HAVEN FOR WILDLIFE

In one of the nation's busiest urban areas, South San Diego Bay remains a vital link in the Pacific Flyway for migratory birds. South Bay is an important wintering area for waterfowl, such as surf scoter, scaup, brant, and bufflehead, and for shorebirds, such as northern phalarope and red knot. It is also an important breeding ground for seabirds, including black

skimmer and several species of tern. South Bay provides habitat for six species of birds protected under the Federal Endangered Species Act (see p. 6).

As the area around San Diego Bay has become more urbanized, South Bay habitats have become increasingly essential for wildlife. Much of the area's best remaining mudflats, salt marshes, and eelgrass beds are found here. The salt ponds and surrounding shallow waters provide habitat for large numbers of seabirds and shorebirds. A 1994 study recorded more than half a million bird sightings in the salt ponds alone in a single year.

Yet most wildlife in San Diego Bay receives only indirect protection. Wildlife and habitats are threatened by encroaching development. It is often difficult for people to view the birds without disturbing them or trespassing on private property.

Establishing a new refuge unit in South Bay would give the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service a chance to protect and restore the small portion of the Bay where native habitats remain. No new or additional zoning or land-use regulations would be created by the Service within the approved refuge acquisition boundary; land-use designations and zoning would remain the responsibility of local jurisdictions. The proposed unit would be dedicated to the conservation of wildlife and habitat, and available for the quiet enjoyment for people who come to see the birds of South San Diego Bay.

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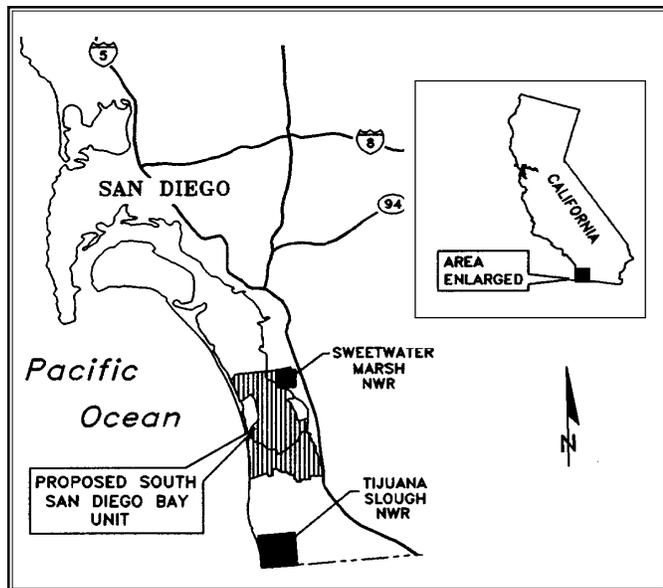
THE PROPOSAL

The Service proposes to establish an approved boundary for the the South San Diego Bay Unit of the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge. Once the boundary is approved, the Service would negotiate with willing participants to acquire or otherwise protect land within this boundary. Lands purchased or protected under special agreement would become part of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Lands not added to the Refuge System would continue to be managed by their owners or according to negotiated agreement.

PURPOSE OF THE PROPOSAL

- To provide the Service with authority to acquire or otherwise protect wildlife habitat under the National Wildlife Refuge System. Protection would follow acquisition (from willing participants) or negotiated agreements.
- To provide the Service with the opportunity to manage, enhance, restore, and protect refuge areas for the benefit of federally listed and other trust species.
- To provide an opportunity for the Service to develop compatible wildlife-dependent recreational activities in partnership with local communities.

Figure 1. Project Location, Proposed South San Diego Bay Unit

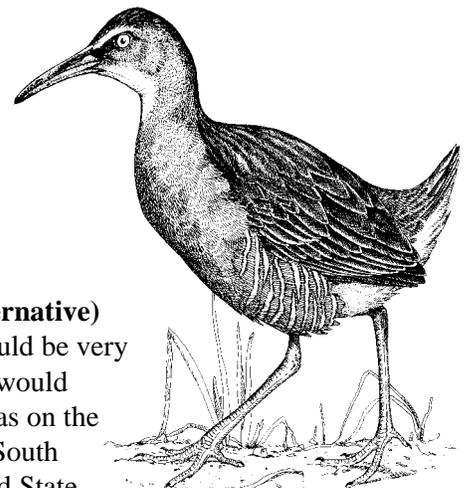


THE BOUNDARY ALTERNATIVES

With the help of interested individuals, agencies, and groups, the Fish and Wildlife Service has developed four alternatives (including a no action alternative) for the proposed South San Diego Bay Unit. See figure 1 below for project location, and figure 2 on the next page for a map of the alternatives.

Alternative A. Alternative A would include approximately 5,000 acres of public and private land within the proposed South San

Diego Bay Unit boundary. This is the largest of the alternatives, covering the entire study area.



Light-footed clapper rail
©Shari Erickson

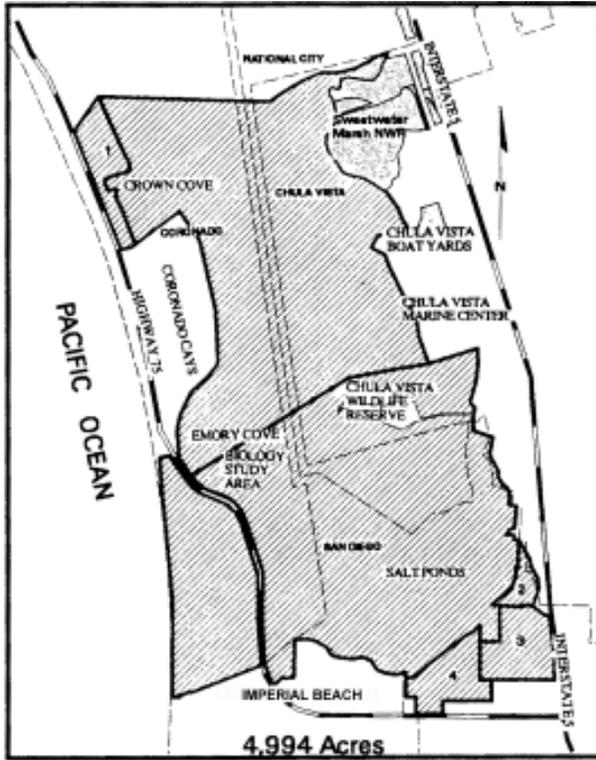
Alternative B. (Preferred Alternative)

Alternative B would be very similar to A, but would exclude three areas on the perimeter of the South Bay: Silver Strand State Beach, Pond 20, and Area 2. Alternative B would include approximately 4,770 acres of public and private land within the proposed South San Diego Bay Unit. Alternative B would cover about 96 percent of Alternative A.

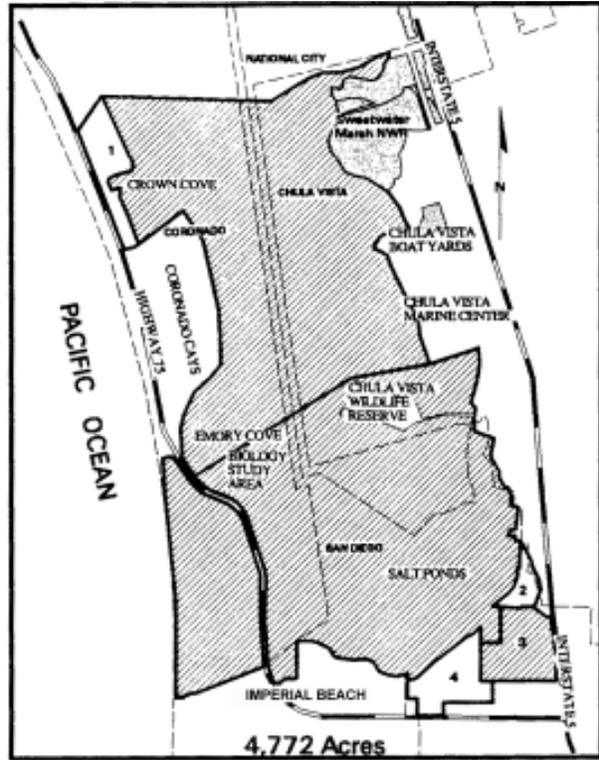
Alternative C. Alternative C is the preferred alternative from the 1978 environmental assessment and Finding of No Significant Impact. This boundary encompasses the salt ponds, including Pond 20, Area 2, and part of the MKEG parcel. The only parts of Emory Cove that are included are those south of Emory Channel. Navy land is not included. Alternative C would include approximately 2,200 acres of public and private land within the proposed South San Diego Bay Unit. The area proposed for protection is approximately 44 percent of Alternative A.

Alternative D. (No Action) Under the no action alternative, the Service would not acquire, manage or protect any land under the National Wildlife Refuge System in the South Bay. Existing levels of protection would be expected to continue under this alternative.

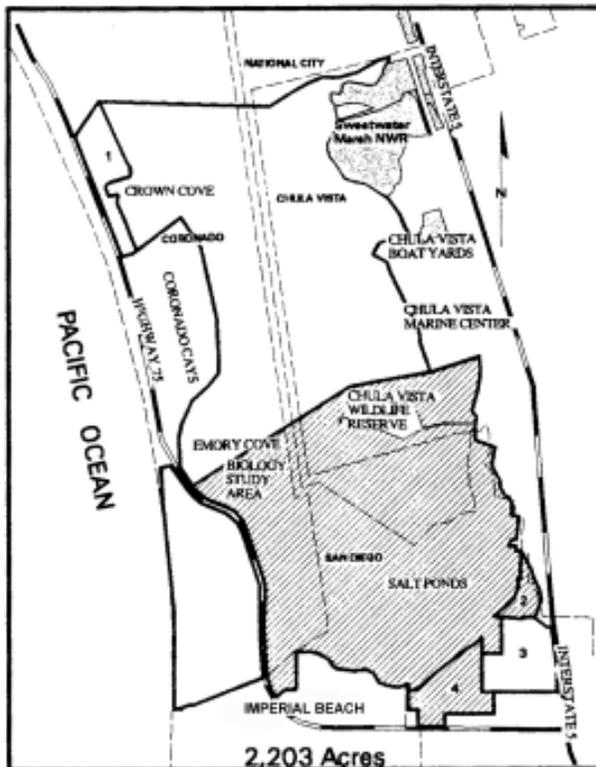
Figure 2. Boundary Alternatives, Proposed South San Diego Bay Unit



Alternative A



Alternative B (Preferred Alternative)



Alternative C

1. Silver Strand State Beach
2. Area Two
3. MKEG/Fenton Parcel
4. Pond 20



● HABITATS ●

HABITATS OF SOUTH SAN DIEGO BAY

The close proximity of different habitat types in South San Diego Bay provides a “one-stop shopping” area that is very attractive to birds. Feeding, nesting, and resting are available for a wide variety of bird species. See table on page 5 for the acreage of habitats protected by the alternatives, and “Key Species” on page 6 for species that use these habitats.

Types of habitat in the study area:

Submerged land: Submerged lands appear as open water. These shallow areas provide crucial wintering habitat for migratory waterfowl, especially surf scoter, scaup, bufflehead, and brant. Both resident and migratory birds use the open waters of the study area. Many of these birds rest and feed together, congregating in large groups called “rafts.”

Eelgrass: Eelgrass is thick green vegetation submerged through most of the ebb and flow of tides, but sometimes exposed at lowest tide. Eelgrass beds provide food and cover for many species of invertebrates and fish, which in turn are eaten by many other species of fish and birds. In addition, numerous fish species rely on eelgrass for spawning, rearing, and feeding areas.

Mudflat/intertidal: These seemingly barren stretches of mud are important resting and feeding locations for all birds. Exposed during all but the highest tides, mudflats are rich in organic matter and invertebrates. Mudflats provide abundant food for a vast array of fish and bird species, and serve as crucial foraging habitat for shorebirds when the tide is out.

Salt pond: Salt ponds in the South Bay provide habitat for migrating shorebirds, wintering waterfowl, and nesting seabirds. The salt ponds on the south end of the

Bay are a specialized habitat type, interspersing shallow open water with mudflats, dry dikes, and salt marsh. The salt ponds are particularly important for shorebirds and seabirds because they represent one of the few large feeding, resting, and nesting areas remaining along the highly urbanized southern California coast.

Salt marsh: Salt marsh habitat provides nesting, feeding, and high-tide escape area for a variety of species. In the study area, salt marsh is characterized by low-growing vegetation dominated by pickleweed. Salt marsh habitat is particularly rare due to losses from shoreline development.

Beaches, dunes, and coastal created land: Coastal created land was formed from deposits of dredged material from other locations in the Bay. These coastal lands provide important habitat for listed species, migrating shorebirds, and nesting seabirds. Ocean front beaches and dunes are found at the Naval Radio Receiving Facility, which is a composite of several other habitats including vernal pools and nontidal wetlands.

Fallow agricultural lands: Old fields in the study area support limited numbers of wildlife, but possess high potential for wetland restoration by virtue of their low elevation, past history as tidal wetlands, and relatively undeveloped nature.



Sea lavender
©Shari Erickson

Riparian: Riparian or streamside vegetation in the study area supports several migratory songbird species. The river channel also contains salt marsh and mudflat areas. The riparian vegetation in the study area buffers these important habitats from urban activities.

Table 1. Acres of habitat potentially protected by refuge status under alternatives A through D, South San Diego Bay Project.

	Study Area	Alternative A	Alternative B	Alternative C	Alternative D
Submerged land	1,721	1,721	1,721	380	0
Eelgrass	691	691	691	50	0
Mudflat/intertidal	492	492	492	429	0
Salt marsh*	57	57	57	54	0
Salt pond	1,175	1,175	1,068	1,175	0
Beaches, dunes, and coastal created land	696	696	589	89	0
Riparian	8	8	8	3	0
Fallow agricultural land	154	154	146	23	0
Total Acres	4,994	4,994	4,772	2,203	0

* Does not include acreage along dikes in salt ponds.

**SAN DIEGO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE, OTAY-SWEETWATER UNIT
New Office Open for Business**

San Diego Refuge Complex Manager Dean Rundle has announced the opening of a new office to serve wildlife and the public on the Otay-Sweetwater and Vernal Pools Units.

“Acquiring and protecting habitat is a huge accomplishment,” said Rundle. “Our challenge now is to manage that land for the long term-- that takes good people working on the land and maintaining close communications with our neighbors. We are fortunate to have recruited some outstanding employees.”

Refuge Manager Hired

The first on-site Refuge Manager for the Otay-Sweetwater/Vernal Pools units is Tom Roster, who has over 10 years experience managing national wildlife refuges in the Midwest. “Having an experienced land manager at Otay-Sweetwater is a real benefit,” said Rundle. “Excellence in land stewardship and public service is our goal, and Tom Roster has hit the ground running in both areas.”

In early August, the Service hired Ron Huffman as the first on-site wildlife biologist for San Diego NWR. “Ron’s expertise in ornithology, monitoring of bird popu-

lations, and use of GIS technology is a real blessing,” said Rundle. “We need to get a better handle on refuge wildlife populations, and how they interact with people. Having our own on-site biologist will help us meet those needs.”

Managing the new refuge lands in East County demanded a local presence in the community. “To our neighbors in Rancho San Diego, Jamul, and Spring Valley, the Refuge Complex office in Carlsbad might as well be on the moon,” said Rundle. In late July, the Service opened a new Refuge Headquarters in Jamul. Besides Roster and Huffman, the new office houses District Fire Management Officer Joette Borzik, and Bureau of Land Management Law Enforcement Rangers Richard Smith and Joe Funk.

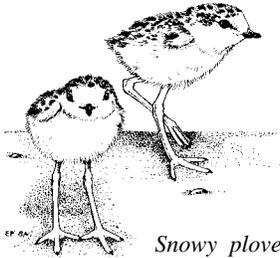
“We have an innovative job sharing program with BLM,” said Rundle. “Ranger Richard Smith is working half-time patrolling the San Diego NWR. This was the quickest way for us to get professional law enforcement coverage for the new refuge lands.”

Stop By and Visit

The new office is located in the professional building at 13910 Lyons Valley Road, Suite R., Jamul, California, 91935. The public is welcome to visit, write, or call the Refuge Office at (619) 669-7295.

KEY SPECIES

San Diego County is home to more endangered and threatened species than any other county in the continental United States. South San Diego Bay provides habitat for six federally listed bird species, one threatened turtle, and one endangered plant, as well as the state-endangered Belding's savannah sparrow. In addition, hundreds of thousands of migrating shorebirds, wintering waterfowl, and nesting seabirds depend heavily on South Bay. Following is a list of the major species and types of birds the Service proposes to protect, and the habitats where they are found in South Bay.



Snowy plover chicks, Alison Banks, USFWS

MAJOR TYPES OF BIRDS

Migrating shorebirds
Wintering waterfowl

Nesting seabirds

HABITAT

Salt ponds, mudflats
Submerged lands, eelgrass, salt ponds, mudflats (during high tide)
Salt ponds, eelgrass, mudflats (during high tide)

LISTED SPECIES

Light-footed clapper rail
California least tern

Western snowy plover

American peregrine falcon
Bald eagle
Brown pelican

Green sea turtle
Salt marsh bird's beak

Belding's savannah sparrow

STATUS

Endangered
Endangered

Threatened

Endangered
Threatened
Endangered

Threatened
Endangered

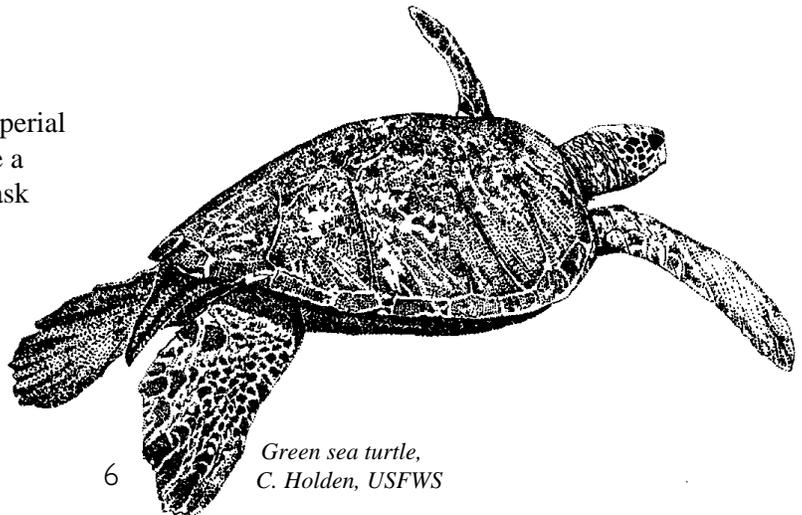
State Endangered

HABITAT

Salt marsh
Salt ponds, mudflats, submerged lands, beaches, dunes, and coastal created land
Salt ponds, mudflats, beaches, dunes, and coastal created land
Created lands, salt ponds
Submerged lands
Submerged lands, salt ponds, mudflats, beaches, dunes, and coastal created land
Eelgrass, submerged lands
Beaches, dunes, and coastal created land, salt marsh
Salt marsh, mudflats

TIJUANA SLOUGH
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
Comprehensive Conservation Plan

Tijuana Slough National Wildlife Refuge in Imperial Beach will be the first California refuge to have a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). A task force of Service, state agency, county, and city representatives, and private citizens and organizations has been drafting the CCP for nearly a year. A draft CCP will be available soon for public comment. For more information call the Tijuana Estuary Visitor Center at (619) 575-3613 or 575-2704



Green sea turtle, C. Holden, USFWS

PLANNING
SCHEDULE

PROPOSED SOUTH
SAN DIEGO BAY UNIT

Draft EA/LPP Late Fall 1997

Public open Winter 1998
houses

Final EA/LPP Winter 1998

Public notice Winter 1998
of decision

Unforeseen circumstances could change this schedule. We will keep you posted if any major planning dates change.

WHO TO CONTACT

Information on Proposed South San Diego Bay Unit

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or

Andrew Yuen, Deputy Refuge Mgr.
San Diego NWR Complex
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
2736 Loker Avenue West
Carlsbad, CA 92008
(760) 930-0168
FAX (760) 930-0256

Information on Refuge Planning and Compliance

Abbey Kucera, Fish and Wildlife Biologist
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
911 N.E. 11th Ave., 3rd Floor West
Portland, OR 97232-4181
(503) 231-2231 or (800) 662-8933
FAX (503) 231-6161

Information on San Diego County Endangered Species' Issues or MSCP

Sherry Barrett, Wildlife Biologist
Nancy Gilbert, Wildlife Biologist
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
2730 Loker Avenue West
Carlsbad, CA 92008
(760) 431-9440
FAX (760) 431-9618

Information on Land Acquisitions

Jane Scott, Realty Specialist
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Carlsbad, CA 92008
(760) 930-0209
FAX (760) 930-0256

Let us know if your address changes or if you would like to add or delete your name from the mailing list. Unless we hear from you, your name will remain on the mailing list for all future Planning Updates. Call (800) 662-8933 for changes and additions.

WHAT'S A FLYWAY?

The term "flyway" refers to a migration corridor, plus its end destinations, used by migratory birds. Habitats within flyways must provide adequate food, water, and safe resting spots, as well as spring and summer nesting areas. Habitats also must provide wintering areas with enough food to allow the birds to gain enough weight and strength to fly back in the spring and immediately begin nesting and then rearing young. In North America, the four major routes are the Atlantic, Mississippi, Central, and Pacific flyways. Individual birds may not always use the same flyway from year to year.



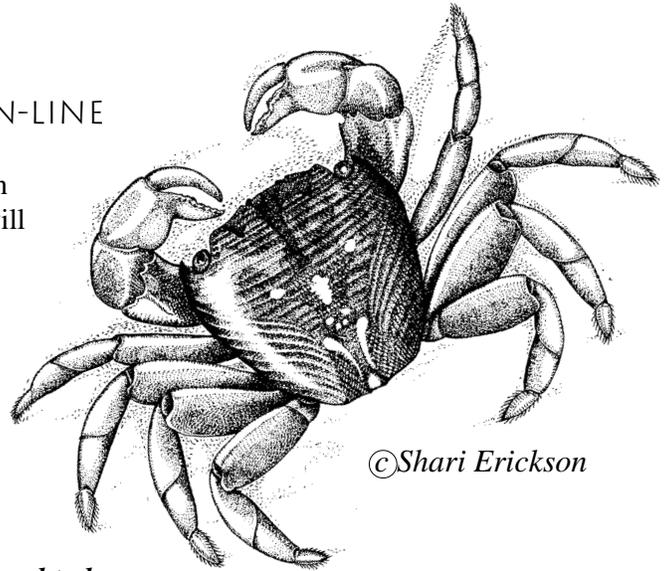
Pacific Flyway, by Frederick Lincoln

THIS IS YOUR PLANNING UPDATE FOR THE
●SAN DIEGO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE●

NEW!

PLANNING INFO ON-LINE

Check out the new planning home page, now available on the World Wide Web. We will offer electronic versions of some of our planning documents, as well as a glossary and some useful links.



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WEBSITE ADDRESS:

www.r1.fws.gov/planning/plnhome.html



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Fish and Wildlife Service (Attn: ARW/RE/Planning)
911 NE 11th Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97232-4181

Address correction requested