Photo Credit: California State Parks

Lagoon Interim Breach Project at Pescadero State Beach

September 12, 2012 - The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Restoration Center (NOAA) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), in close coordination with the State agencies that have jurisdiction over Pescadero Marsh Natural (Preserve), will manually breach the Pescadero lagoon sandbar up to two times between September 1 and December 31, 2012. The first planned breach (done in conjunction with the California Department of Fish and Game and California State Parks) will take place sometime in the next few weeks, depending on the timing of the sandbar formation.

This project is an attempt to maintain sufficient water quality in the lagoon and reduce the likelihood of a fish kill that has been observed at the time of the natural breaching of the lagoon. The work will consist of excavating a channel through the sandbar at the mouth of Pescadero Creek. The actual "digging" will be done by volunteer labor provided by the Native Sons of the Golden West, Pescadero, as well as NOAA and Service staff. All ground crew activity will be directed by the NOAA Restoration Center.

Fish kills have occurred at the Preserve for 11 years in a row and in 13 of the last 17 years. There has been a wide range in the number of reported steelhead carcasses observed following the fall breaches, from as few as four to eight, to several hundred. Last year, 235 dead steelhead were collected, including pre-spawn adults. While there is no evidence that these fish kill events have a significant effect on the population of steelhead in the Pescadero Creek watershed, NOAA and the Service consider the project an urgent matter due in part to the status of the steelhead as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act.

Water quality will be monitored before and after the sand-bar is breached. In addition to NOAA monitoring water quality and its potential impacts on listed fish, State Parks will be installing an array of continuously recording data sensors throughout marsh to develop a broad assessment of what impacts, if any, the breaching may have had on the entire system.