

Pajaro Estuary Restoration

Resilience and Restoration Plan and Phase 1 Project



LAND TRUST
SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Land Trust of Santa Cruz County

Priority Conservation Values

Habitat and
Biodiversity

Working Lands

Access to
Nature for All

Primary Toolkit

Land Protection
via real estate
transactions

Land Management
+ Stewardship

Collaboration and
Partnerships





-  **NFWF**
-  **NOAA**
-  California
Department of Conservation
-  Coastal
Conservancy
-  California
**WILDLIFE
CONSERVATION
BOARD**
- The Nature Conservancy** 
- 
-  **CCWG**
CENTRAL COAST
WETLANDS GROUP
- Driscoll's**
Only the Finest Berries™



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**Pajaro River Watershed
Monterey Bay
Central California**



Context of the Estuary



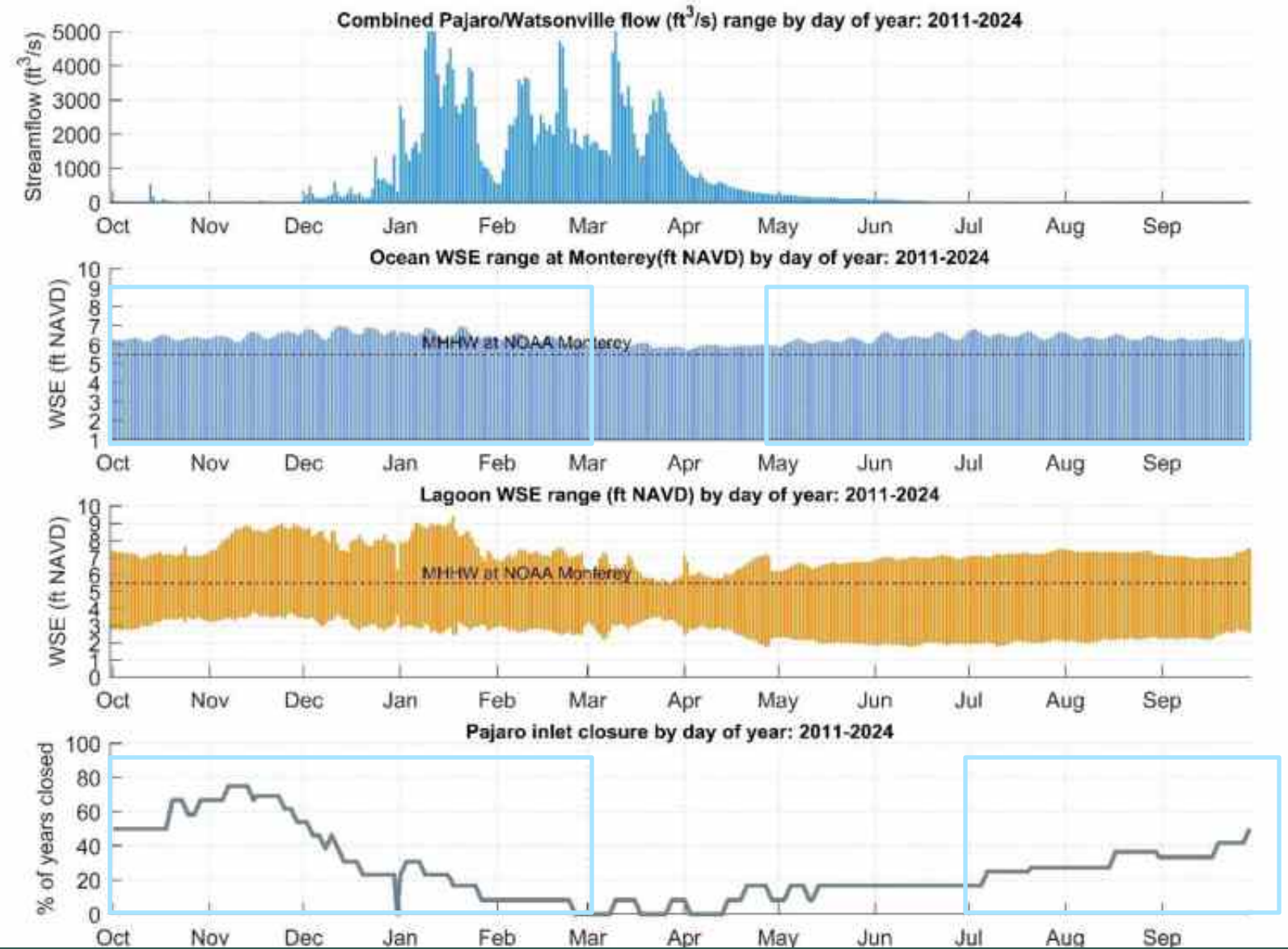
Ecologic Context

Coastal wetlands

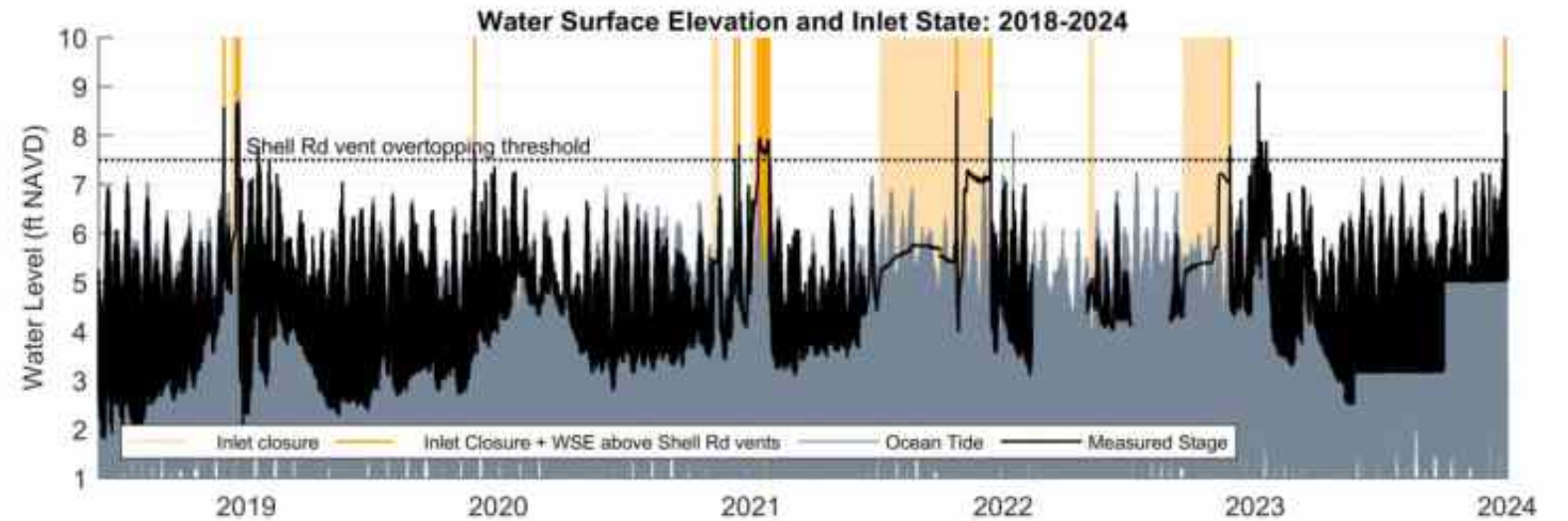
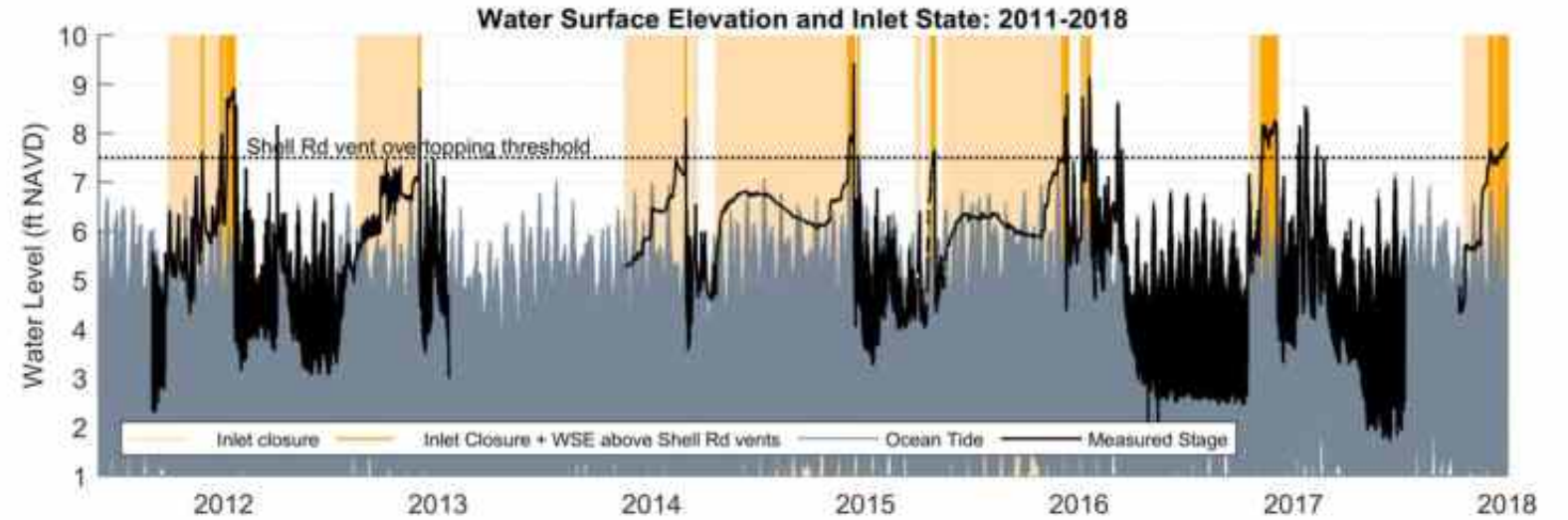
- Extremely productive for wildlife and fisheries
- Valuable for water quality, flood attenuation, carbon capture and storage
- Rare: 300 acres of brackish habitat in all of Santa Cruz County
- Migratory birds, sea otter + harbor seal, steelhead + tidewater goby (salty end)
- California red-legged frog, western pond turtle, migratory birds (fresh end)



Pajaro River Mouth Dynamics



Pajaro River Mouth Dynamics



Ecologic Challenges

- Habitat loss
- Altered hydrology
- Water quality
- Sea Level Rise

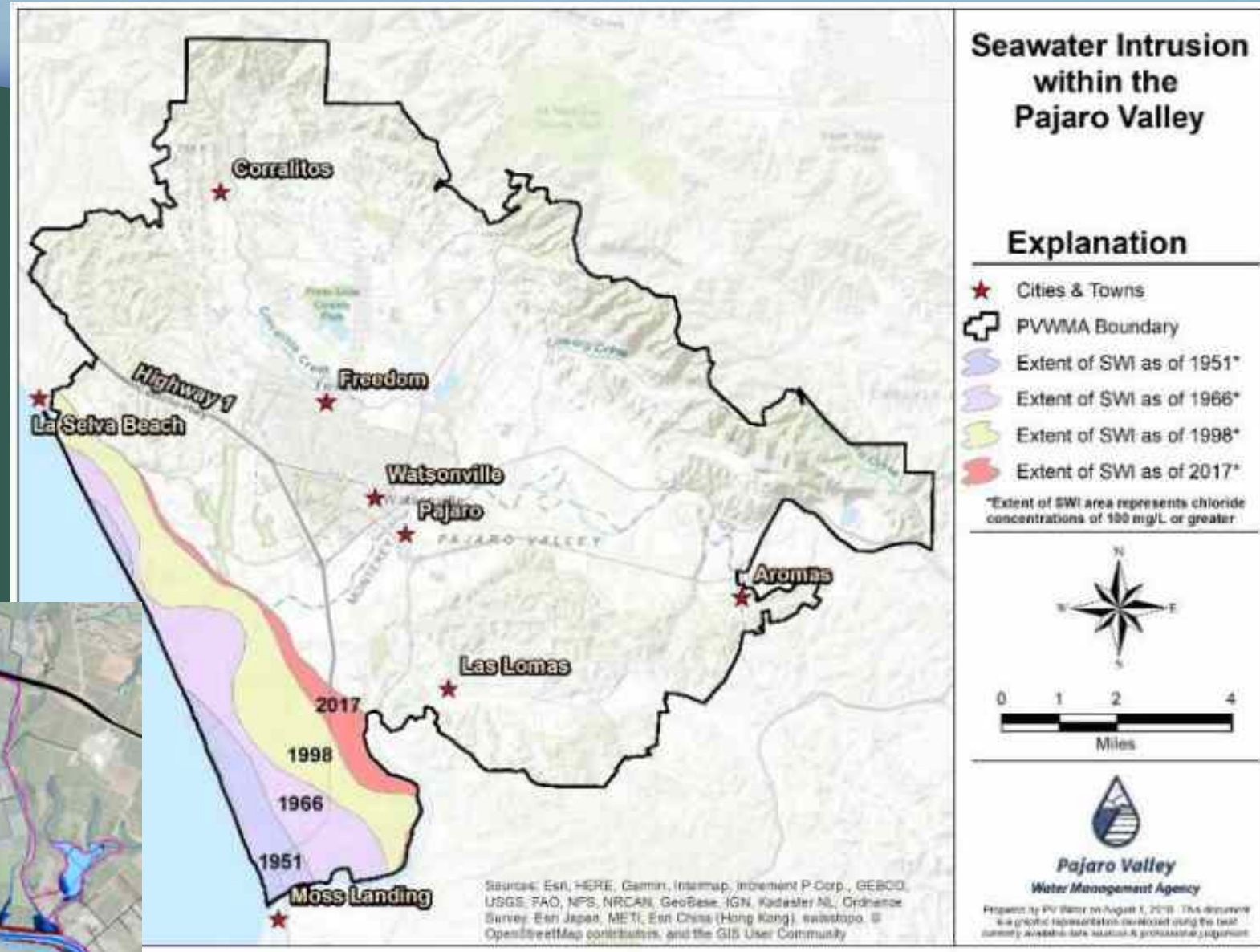


Figure 2. Historical Changes to Lower Watsonville Slough. Adapted from Whipple, A. and Grossinger, R. 2008



Infrastructure Challenges

- Seawater Intrusion
- River Flooding
- Large Wave Events
- Sea Level Rise



Ag Economics Context

- Among the most valuable farmland in the US
- 1 in 8 Santa Cruz County jobs
- Typical model: Growers rent the whole ranch
- They pay for every acre, and farm every acre
- But parts of many ranches have become less productive from flooding, salt and soil saturation
- Growers have been vocal to Landowners about the issue
- This creates the opportunity for a creative solution



Land Trust Actions



Strategies

Work with Willing Landowners and Growers

Collaborate with growers and landowners to identify poor producing farmland suitable for restoration

Buy the right to farm those areas

Extinguish that right

Remove those areas from ag leases



Fee Purchase Strategy

- The Land Trust is landowner
 - Keeps productive land in the lease
 - Removes poor acreage from the lease
 - Work with the Grower to adjust the lease in the future as conditions change
 - Lease revenue pays for restoration and stewardship



Rolling Restoration Easement Strategy

Conventional Easement

- Prohibits subdivision and development
- Protects one or more primary conservation values
- Ownership and all other rights remain with the Landowner

Rolling Restoration Easement

- A Conventional Easement, plus:
- Land Trust acquires restoration rights in a Restoration Area, which is delineated with the Landowner
- The easement prompts periodic discussion to revisit the condition of the Ag land
- An easement amendment is used to move additional acreage into the Restoration Area with mutual agreement

Towards Implementation

Pajaro Estuary Resilience and Restoration Plan (Resilience Plan)

Phase 1 Design



Collaborative Process

Advisory Team and Infrastructure and Modeling Team



Our Partners



... and more joining in

Goals

Goals

Reduce saltwater flood impacts on

- prime farmland
- Infrastructure
- freshwater supplies

Restore estuarine habitats

- tidal marsh
- mudflats
- channels and creeks



Project Areas

- ~500 acres of farmland
- 120 acres are ready to restore
- Combination of fee acquisition and easements with restoration rights

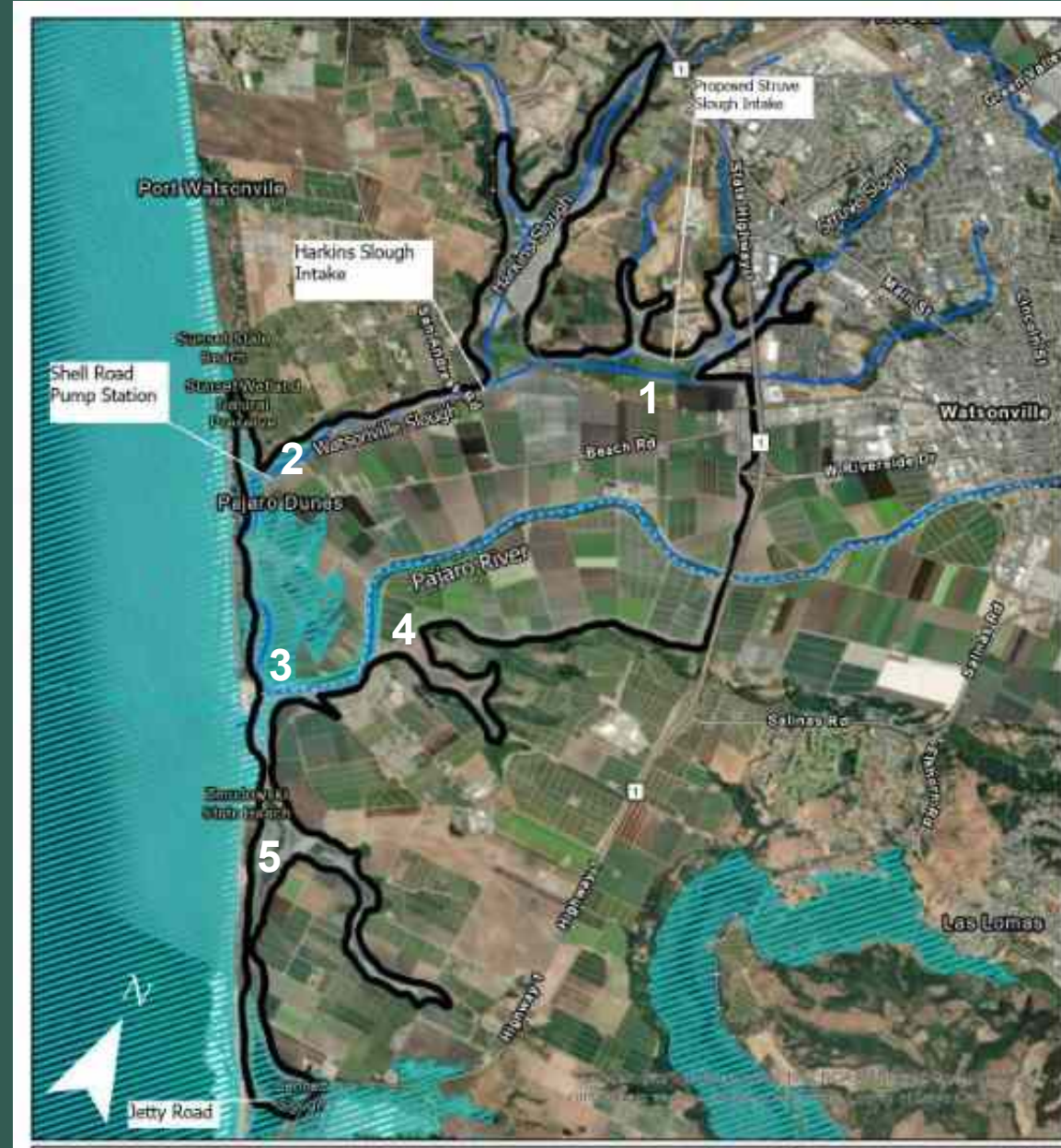


Resilience Planning Area

5 Planning Areas

Each have distinct:

- Hydrology
- Salinity
- Infrastructure
- Ag operations



Project Details

Ag – friendly Restoration

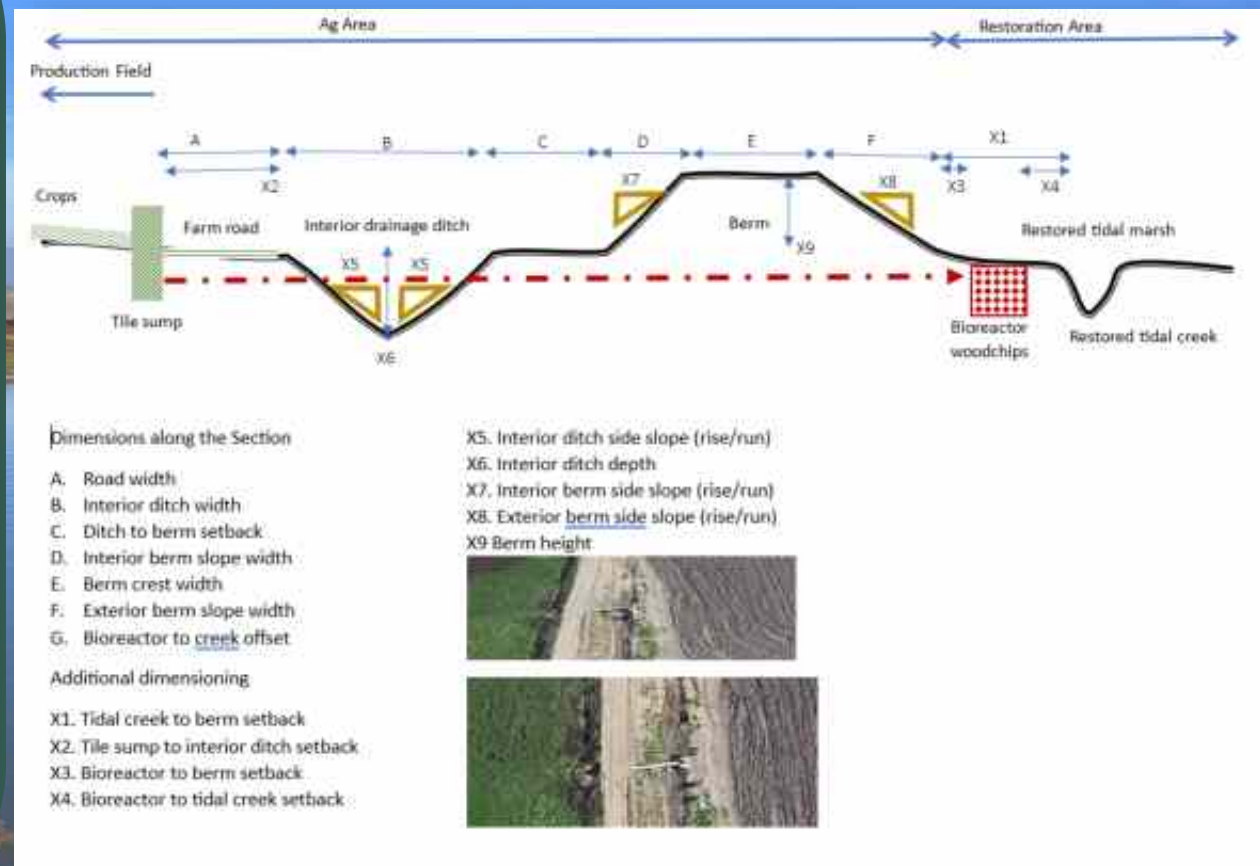
Relocate vulnerable infrastructure

Establish buffer areas and new berms to protect remaining ag

Restore wetlands

and

Coordinate related flood, ag and ecosystem projects



Design

An aerial photograph of a coastal landscape. A river or estuary flows from the top center towards the bottom left. To the right of the river is a large, flat green field, likely agricultural. To the left of the river is a road and some residential buildings. A yellow line is drawn across the image, starting from the top right, curving along the right side of the river, and then extending towards the bottom left. The line appears to be a design boundary or a path.

Productive habitats

Re-contour fields to support diverse wetlands

Plant native vegetation as needed

Outcome

Productive habitats

30% increase in the estuarine wetlands in our county

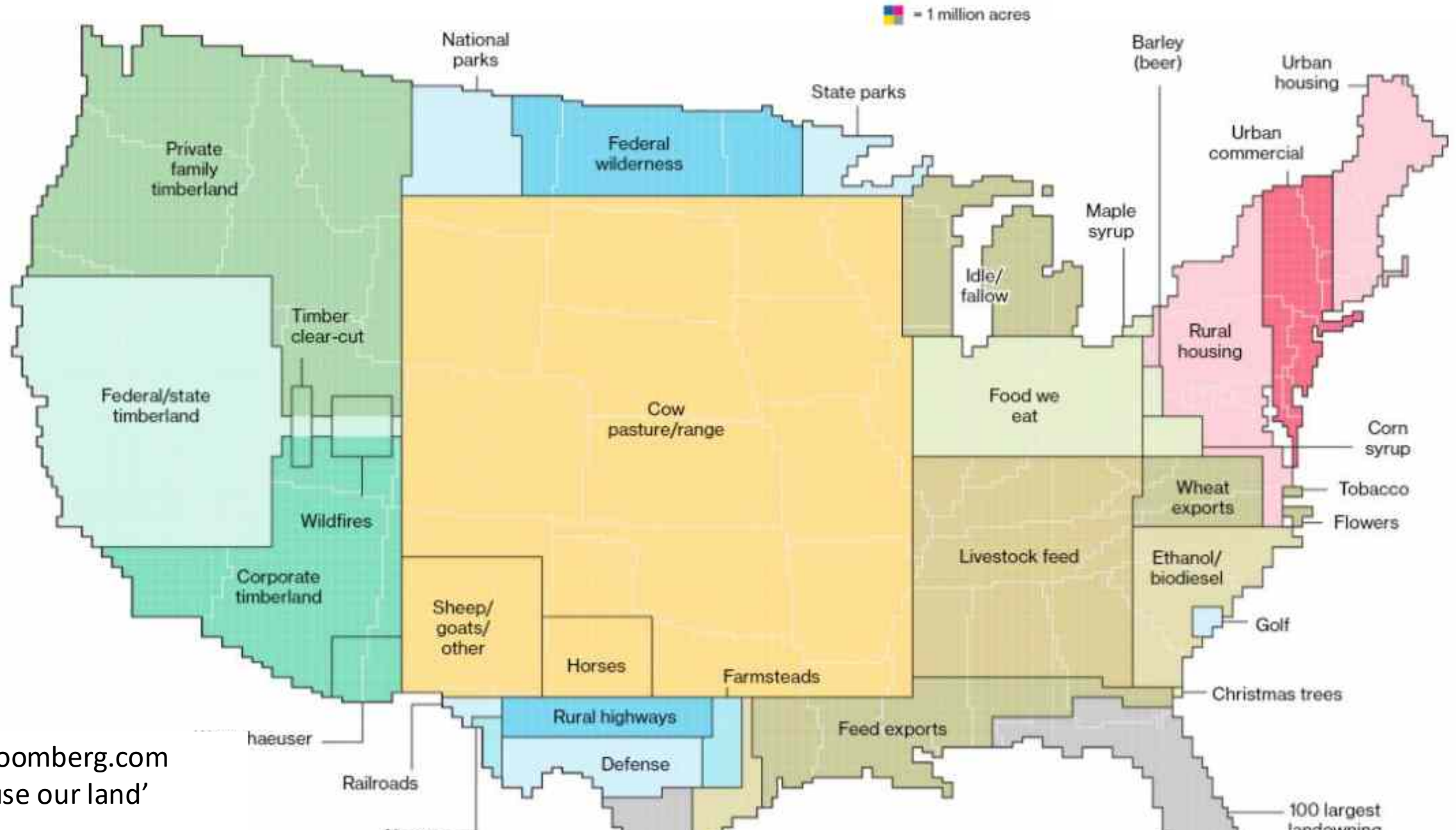
Benefits to migratory birds

Benefits to estuarine fish

2028 Construction start



Who to work with? Ag is the answer



Source: Bloomberg.com
'How we use our land'

Questions and Comments

We'd love to hear from you

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