



South Bay salt ponds before and after restoration. In just a year, native pickleweed colonizes the mudflats. Photo: South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project.

If you're as depressed as I am by the current political climate and attempts on Capitol Hill to roll back everything from clean air protections to food safety, you might be feeling the need for some good news. Here's at least a small antidote.

The San Jose Mercury News [reports that](#) fish and birds are responding well to restoration of former salt ponds on the edges of San Francisco Bay to more natural tidal marsh. Continued operation of the salt ponds by Cargill Salt, and proposals to develop them, triggered a wave of litigation over federal jurisdiction and regulatory authority in the 1990s. Although [those disputes continue](#) in a few locations, Cargill sold most of its Bay-front property to the state and federal governments in 2003. The new owners launched "[the largest tidal wetland restoration project on the West Coast](#)." Beginning in 2004, they began breaching levees that had isolated some salt ponds from the Bay and installing tidal gates in others, restoring more natural salinity levels. Although many difficult decisions remain ahead, the early returns are good. Within a very short time, salt ponds which had resembled a moonscape began to look more natural. And last week, [at a symposium](#) hosted by the US Geological Survey, scientists reported that many species of fish, ducks and shorebirds have already returned to restored ponds. Besides being good news for local ecosystems (and local birdwatchers), this story is a powerful reminder that although people have great power to disrupt natural systems, many of those systems are quite resilient and will rebound if we just give them the chance.

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