

## Turning the Tide

Watch the segments online at <http://education.savingthebay.org/turning-the-tide>

Watch the segments on DVD: Episode 4, 13:31–16:27; 16:29–20:05; and 33:40–35:10

Video lengths: 3 minutes 16 seconds; 3 minutes 54 seconds; 1 minute 49 seconds

### SUBJECT/S

Science

History

### GRADE LEVELS

9–12

### CA CONTENT STANDARDS

#### Grade 11

*History–Social Science*

11.11.3. Describe the changing roles of women in society as reflected in the entry of more women into the labor force and the changing family structure.

11.11.5. Trace the impact of, need for, and controversies associated with environmental conservation, expansion of the national park system, and the development of environmental protection laws, with particular attention to the interaction between environmental protection advocates and property rights advocates.

#### Grade 12

*History–Social Science*

12.3.2. Explain how civil society makes it possible for people, individually or in association with others, to bring their influence to bear on government in ways other than voting and elections.

12.6.4. Describe the means that citizens use to participate in the political process (e.g., voting, campaigning, lobbying, filing a legal challenge, demonstrating, petitioning, picketing, running for political office).

### VIDEO OVERVIEW

In the 1950s, few people questioned the steady filling and development of San Francisco Bay. An extraordinary grassroots effort—the first of its kind in the nation—changed the fate of the Bay.



The founders of Save San Francisco Bay Association, (L to R) Esther Gulick, Sylvia McLaughlin and Catherine Kerr. (Save the Bay Archive)

In these segments you'll learn:

- about the movement to save San Francisco Bay from development that began in the early 1960s and changed how people thought about conservation.
- that the effort to save the Bay was extraordinary in that it was both a grassroots effort and one that was led by women.
- that individuals' concern, commitment, strength, and persistence were critically important in the movement to protect the Bay from development.
- that individual citizens have the power to change government.

### TOPIC BACKGROUND

From the time of the Gold Rush, San Francisco Bay has been used in many different ways. Starting in the 1860s, huge quantities of mud and gravel from hydraulic mining flowed down the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers, eventually settling as fine sediment in the Bay. By the end of the century, much of the shallow bay flats had filled in, setting a pattern of use that continued well into the 20th century.

As the population of the Bay Area grew, the Bay was viewed as a resource that could be filled with trash and dry fill to create land for housing, industry, manufacturing, military, port, and airport facilities. The Bay was commonly used as a sewage and garbage disposal; afternoon breezes in the East Bay often carried the aroma of untreated sewage.

Between 1850 and 1960, an average of two square miles of the Bay were filled each year. In 1850, San Francisco Bay (along with San Pablo and Suisun bays) covered around 680 square miles; by 1970, 240 square miles of water surface had disappeared. Much of the remaining area is less than 12 feet deep and easily filled.

The first effective sewage treatment plants on the Bay came on line in the 1950s, the first steps in an important process of cleaning up the Bay. Then, in the 1960s, the seemingly inevitable fate of the shrinking Bay turned a corner. Largely through the work of three women—Catherine Kerr, Sylvia McLaughlin, and Esther Gulick—public attitudes shifted, and the Bay began to be viewed as a natural resource to be preserved for future generations.

Prompted by the city of Berkeley's plan to expand by filling 2,000 acres of the Bay for housing and industry, Kerr, McLaughlin, and Gulick initiated one of the first grassroots

## VOCABULARY

### **bay fill**

the material used to fill in shallow parts of the Bay to create new land for homes, businesses, roads, and other development

### **conservation**

planned management of a natural resource to prevent its destruction or exploitation

### **development**

the process of converting land to a new purpose by constructing buildings or making use of its resources

### **grassroots organization**

an organization that derives most of its power and reason for being from a community, from ordinary citizens

environmental movements in the country. Most prior conservation efforts were oriented to saving wilderness; this was one of the first efforts to preserve an urban natural resource.

The women founded the Save San Francisco Bay Association, soon known as Save the Bay, in 1961. Employing public pressure as their main strategy, the fledgling organization convinced the Berkeley city government to drop its plans for expansion. However, the Bay was under the jurisdiction of nine county and 32 city governments, each with its own interests in the Bay. These local governments competed with each other to fill the Bay so they could expand their holdings and attract new business and tax revenues. Prevention of similar future efforts would require more coordinated management. It would take a different form of land use control—a state-run coastal management agency that could look beyond local interests and consider the broader public concern.

Kerr, McLaughlin, and Gulick continued their fight by promoting the McAteer-Petris Act. Passed by the state legislature in 1965, the act created the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) as a temporary state agency to prepare a plan for the long-term use of the Bay. The BCDC was also charged with regulating development in and around the Bay while the plan was being prepared.

Approved in 1968, the San Francisco Bay Plan was hailed as a model for developing policies with the participation of a large number of consultants, decision makers, and interest groups. In 1969, revisions to the McAteer-Petris Act made the BCDC a permanent agency, further defined its area and scope of authority, and established the permit system for regulating the Bay and shoreline.

When viewed in light of the times, Save the Bay's early accomplishments in preventing further haphazard development of San Francisco Bay take on even more significance. In 1961, there were few environmental laws on the books, there was no Earth Day, the "environment" was not yet a cause in the public's mind. Further, women were not seen as activists. The fight to save San Francisco Bay from uncontrolled development changed all that.

## PRE-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

- Ask students to think about an issue they care about and might like to change in their community. In small groups, have students share their ideas.
- Ask students to write about someone that has made a positive difference in their personal life or community.

## VIEWING ACTIVITIES

- As students watch the segments, have them list the individuals and organizations mentioned and identify those involved in deciding how to manage the resources of San Francisco Bay. Include people who attended meetings, owned land, or had responsibility for decisions.  
*(Harold Gilliam, Catherine Kerr, David Brower [Sierra Club], Newton Drury [Save the Redwoods League], Audubon, Nature Conservancy, Sylvia McLaughlin, Santa Fe Railroad, Esther Gulick, regional committees, city councils, Save San Francisco Bay Association)*
- Ask students to note and record the three different groups of people that Catherine Kerr, Sylvia McLaughlin, and Esther Gulick tried to influence as they worked to protect San Francisco Bay.  
*(environmental groups, individuals, government officials)*

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Lori Mann** is an environmental education consultant with 30 years' experience at the local, state, and national levels. She has worked extensively with curriculum development and review, has taught numerous environmental education courses and workshops, and served for 15 years as education director at Coyote Point Museum for Environmental Education in San Mateo, California.

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## POST-VIEWING ACTIVITIES

- Discuss why it was significant that the leaders of the Save the Bay movement were women.
- Contact a nonprofit environmental organization in your community and find out why the organization was created, how it got started, and who its leaders are today.
- Explain each of the following quotes from the video segments:
  - Segment 1: "If San Francisco Bay was to be saved, they'd have to do it themselves."
  - Segment 2: "The Save San Francisco Bay Association had emerged onto the political scene."
  - Segment 3: "The Save the Bay movement had won."
- Conduct research and create a timeline showing milestones in the evolution of the environmental movement.
- Use the Internet and other resources to research current issues that are related to San Francisco Bay. Summarize the issues and the perspectives of different stakeholders.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**"The Bay's Best Friend: Sylvia McLaughlin has spent her life advocating for the Bay,"** Jane Kay, *San Francisco Chronicle*

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2003/10/05/CM248834.DTL>

Read a newspaper article about Sylvia McLaughlin and her 40-year effort to protect and preserve San Francisco Bay.

***The Country in the City: The Greening of the San Francisco Bay Area***, Richard A. Walker

<http://www.washington.edu/uwpress/search/books/WALCOC.html>

Published in 2008 by the University of Washington Press, *The Country in the City* offers a history of the greening of the San Francisco Bay Area, tracing environmental politics in the Bay Area from their 19th-century origins to the present.

**History of the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission**, Bay Conservation and Development Commission

<http://www.bcdc.ca.gov/history.shtml>

Review maps showing Bay fill at different times, read about the history of the BCDC, and follow links to information about the McAteer-Petris Act and the San Francisco Bay Plan.

**"How the Bay Was Saved,"** Harold Gilliam, *San Francisco Chronicle*

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2007/04/22/ING8PP9M3E1.DTL>

In this 2007 article, retired *San Francisco Chronicle* environmental columnist Harold Gilliam recalls the 1960s efforts to save San Francisco Bay from development and reflects on their significance to the environmental movement.

**Our History, Save the Bay**

<http://www.savesfbay.org/history>

Explore the Save the Bay website and learn of the organization's history, its achievements, and current issues and activities.

**The San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission, 1964–1973:  
Oral History Transcript / 1984 (© 1986)**, Internet Archive

<http://www.archive.org/details/sanfranbaycons00bodorich>

Read transcripts of an oral history conducted in 1984 by the Regional Oral History Office, the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. The volume includes interviews about the early years of the Bay Conservation and Development Commission with Joseph E. Bodovitz (BCDC's first executive director), Melvin B. Lane (first chairman), and E. Clement Shute Jr. (first legal counsel).

**San Francisco Bay Watershed Curriculum**, Save the Bay

<http://www.savesfbay.org/watershed-curriculum>

Explore Save the Bay's Watershed Curriculum, which contains 29 lesson plans designed to help Bay Area educators easily incorporate experiential, Bay-specific activities and action projects into their teaching.

## CREDITS

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## VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

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#### Segment 1

**HAROLD GILLIAM:** It was 1961. I had a call from somebody who identified herself as Catherine Kerr, whom I didn't know. She added, "Mrs. Clark Kerr," and immediately I snapped to attention because he was president of the university. She said, "The Bay is gradually being filled. It's disappearing. We want to get the conservationists ..."—there was no such word as "environmentalists" at that time—"... we want to get the conservationists going on this to save the Bay. So we're calling a meeting of Bay Area conservationists to find out what can be done about this situation."

So I went up there that night in January, and most of the people there, I knew already. There was Dave Brower from the Sierra Club. There was, as I recall, Newton Drury from the Save the Redwoods League. There were people from Audubon and the Nature Conservancy. And Kay (Catherine) presented this case about the filling of the Bay, asking, "What are you going to do about it?"

**NARRATOR:** No one could have recognized it that night, but the conservation movement with its roots back to John Muir had arrived at a crossroads. Until now, the focus was primarily protecting wilderness and wildlife. Here now was a plea for an urban landscape. The movement's very notion of sacred and profane was being stretched.

**SYLVIA MCLAUGHLIN:** They all agreed that it was important to do something about the Bay. They recognized the problems that we told them about, but they said they were all too busy.

**CATHERINE KERR:** I remember Dave Brower saying, "This is just exceedingly important, but the Sierra Club is interested in wilderness and in trails." And Newton Drury said, "Well, this is very important, but we're saving the redwoods, and we can't save the Bay." It went around the room to the point where there was dead silence, and so we said, "Well, the Bay is going to go down the drain."

**GILLIAM:** I thought these three women were noble idealists and had some wonderful ideals, but I thought they were quite naïve in thinking that it was going to be possible to stop the developers from filling the Bay—to stop the people who owned the Bay, much of the Bay floor, most of it, from proceeding with their plans for fill.

**MALCOLM MARGOLIN:** There was a sense in the '40s and '50s of an inevitability to development and that if there was natural beauty, you may mourn its loss. You may try to preserve little pockets of it here and there, but nothing could stop the engine of progress.

**NARRATOR:** Finally, David Brower suggested the women create a new organization. They were promised mailing lists and endorsements from each of the conservation organizations represented. But if San Francisco Bay was to be saved, they'd have to do it themselves.

## **Segment 2**

JOSEPH BODOVITZ: What was happening around the Bay was, absolutely nobody was looking at the Bay as a whole bay. And each private owner, each city, each county was proceeding under the pressures of population growth and demand for flat land, was proceeding to fill in its shallow parts of the Bay. So virtually everybody was sort of on a bender of “let’s see if we can fill our part, and we’ll have more land for taxable development.”

CHARLES WOLLENBERG: Berkeley, by the 1950s, was built out. There was no more vacant land left in Berkeley. If Berkeley was going to expand, the place it was going to expand was out into the Bay.

NARRATOR: By 1961, a plan to fill 2,000 acres of the Berkeley shoreline was rolling along. The plan had powerful corporate interests behind it, including the Santa Fe Railroad, which held deeds to submerged lands near the shore. In the hills above the Bay, Kay Kerr, Esther Gulick, and Sylvia McLaughlin went to work.

SYLVIA MCLAUGHLIN: We determined to go ahead and start an organization to stop the filling. We started wherever our friends were. We used every list that we could think of: university lists, church lists, club lists.

NARRATOR: In January 1961, the makeshift trio, now calling themselves the Save San Francisco Bay Association, sent out their first letter. The letterhead stated the new organization’s five simple objectives and, thanks to the women’s connections through their husbands at the University of California, presented a “who’s who” list of prominent, instantly recognizable supporters. Included with it was the map of the shrinking Bay.

MCLAUGHLIN: We just used that from then on in our literature. We entitled it “Bay or River?” And people were just really shocked by that I think, so we sent that out with our first invitation to join our fledgling organization.

DAVID LEWIS: And they had what, at the time, was a radical organizing principle: We’re going to volunteer our time as leaders and we’re going to ask people for a dollar—one dollar so that we can afford to mail them information. What we really want is not their money; we want their voices, we want their names, we want to be able to invoke a large group of people in support of our goals.

NARRATOR: In March 1961, just two months after the meeting at Grizzly Peak, the Berkeley city council found its chambers suddenly packed one night with a crowd of citizens opposed to the master plan for fill. The Save San Francisco Bay Association had emerged onto the political scene.

GRAY BRECHIN: Many people wondered how these women could succeed because, of course, they were just housewives. You have to put yourself in the mind of the kind of sexism that was so prevalent at the time.

LEWIS: These women used their own talents. They were genteel, but they were very strong and tenacious. And they didn’t give up.

NARRATOR: The fight for the Berkeley shoreline would last more than two years. But in 1963, the Save San Francisco Bay Association’s persistence finally paid off. In a stunning turn of events, a newly elected city council tabled the master plan for fill. The Save San Francisco Bay Association had won its first victory.



### **Segment 3**

NARRATOR: On June 17, 1965, the McAteer-Petris Act was signed into law. The Save the Bay movement had won.

DAVID LEWIS: I think the leaders of Save the Bay and the legislative movement that was behind it, they wanted to win, but I don't know if they expected to win. Certainly people thought they were crazy to even try.

WILL TRAVIS: Well, I think it's important to remember that the Save the Bay movement took place in the early '60s. That was five years before the Clean Water Act, before the Clean Air Act, before the first Earth Day. All of those efforts, I think, came about because these women showed, through a grassroots organization, that people could change the way society treated and dealt with an important natural resource. So I think if they hadn't done it, we probably wouldn't have had those other events transpire so quickly. It really emboldened the American people to fulfill the vision and the dream of American democracy.

NARRATOR: The McAteer-Petris Act created the world's first coastal management agency—a model ultimately used to protect coastline and estuaries around the world.