

Major Progress in Wetland Restoration Project

Last Update: 1/23 7:20 pm

Workers on a 150-acre wetlands restoration project in Del Mar connected the San Dieguito Lagoon to the Pacific Ocean Wednesday, allowing fish to once again return to a long cut-off hatchery.

The \$86 million San Dieguito Wetlands Restoration Project is being undertaken by Southern California Edison to offset impacts on the marine environment caused by the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station.

"One of California's largest environmental restoration projects reaches a major milestone with the opening of the new San Dieguito Lagoon basin to the ocean," said Dick Rosenblum, Edison senior vice president.

"This is a significant step toward our ultimate goal -- creating a new breeding habitat for ocean fish and attracting wildlife including endangered species back to the Southern California coast," he said.

In the early 1900s, the construction of an airport and sewage treatment lagoons filled a former wetlands area near the Del Mar Fairgrounds, according to SCE officials. As a result, ocean fish were blocked from accessing the once sheltered area as a spawning site.

Workers today removed a temporary earthen dam separating the restoration project's new 40-acre lagoon from the tidal channel.

During the next high tide, the daily 80-million-gallon tidal exchange that once nourished the former fish and bird habitat will reach the wetlands area for the first time in 70 years, according to SCE.

Once the new basin is connected to the tidal channel, twice-daily tides are expected to bring a variety of ocean fish to the new shallow-water habitat, including top smelt, grunion, turbot, halibut, mullet, pipe fish, bass and gobies, according to the utility.

A lagoon observation deck is being built by SCE at the old Grand Avenue Bridge in Del Mar across from Jimmy Durante Boulevard.

