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## Sea Returns at Last to Talbert Marsh : 75 Gather to Hail Restoration of Bog

February 18, 1989 | KENNETH T. YAMADA | Times Staff Writer

A flood of ocean water poured through a breached levee in Huntington Beach on Friday, as part of a plan to restore a dusty, 26-acre tract to its natural condition as a saltwater marsh.

About 75 supporters of marsh restoration, who gathered at the levee-opening ceremony, hope that the once-dusty, garbage-strewn lot--east of Pacific Coast Highway and bordered by Brookhurst Street and the Santa Ana River--will transform itself back into a lush marsh, where birds will again flock and marine life will once more thrive.

The supporters celebrated a 6-year cooperative effort to restore Talbert Marsh by residents, the Huntington Beach Wetlands Conservancy, the state Coastal Conservancy, Caltrans and county agencies.

The Huntington Beach conservancy, concerned about the loss of nearly 3,000 acres salt marshes near the mouth of the Santa Ana River over the decades, pushed for the project and will oversee its completion.

The undertaking proves that government agencies and citizen groups can work together, state Coastal Conservancy officer Pete Granell said.

The levee opening thus far "represents the most significant milestone" of the project, said Gordon Smith, Huntington Beach conservancy chairman.

Water was the main ingredient missing from the marsh until a backhoe was used Friday to breach the levee. "This water will flood this wetland and nourish it," state Fish and Game biologist Esther Burkett said.

Two ocean-tide cycles daily will flush water full of invertebrates and fish into the area and help vegetation grow, she said.

"We'll immediately start to see birds using the area," conservancy board member Gordon W. Smith added.

The marsh will be good for least terns, birds that nest on nearby beaches, he said. "They can come over here and feed."

But "don't expect it to look like a marsh for several years," said consulting biologist Barbara Massey, who will monitor the area for at least the next 2 years. "I don't know how long it will take to be covered with dense vegetation."

Plants native to marshes, such as cord grass, may have to be planted if they do not sprout naturally, she said.

The idea of restoring the marsh grew out of complaints in 1983 by Gary Gorman and other residents who considered the dry lot an eyesore. They started the Huntington Beach Wetlands Conservancy, which eventually received a \$330,000 grant from the state Coastal Conservancy.

At the Huntington Beach group's urging, the state group bought a 16-acre parcel from Caltrans. The county contributed \$405,000 and use of an adjoining 10 acres.

The total cost of marsh construction will be about \$488,000, project officials said. Remaining funds will pay for planning, engineering and maintenance.

Caltrans representatives said Friday that the marsh will compensate for nearly 1 acre of bird foraging ground that will be lost within the next 3 years when Pacific Coast Highway is widened where it crosses the Santa Ana River.

The Huntington Beach conservancy's plans for the area include a 1.5-acre sand dune next to the river, a public access trail and a direct channel to the ocean, Gorman said.

One Huntington Beach resident, Chris Craig, said he came out to watch the ceremony because "the wetlands are a natural heritage."

The marsh is a welcome change from condominium development, he said: "To see one small step in the other direction is encouraging."