



Photo: Dave Sansom, courtesy of Forrest Richardson

# Reducing flood risk

Reinvention of Palo Alto municipal course helps protect the community from flooding

**The San Francisquito Creek in Palo Alto, California, has overflowed multiple times in recent years. The most devastating occasion was in February 1998, when over 1,000 homes flooded, leading to mass evacuation and millions of dollars of damage.**

One of a number of measures considered to help protect the community from future flooding was the role its popular municipal golf course could play.

The city hired Forrest Richardson, ASGCA, to develop a transformation plan for the course, that would include widening the part of the San Francisquito Creek that runs along the west and north perimeters of the course and the expansion of wetland areas on the course.

Richardson’s proposals would also address deferred maintenance issues by rebuilding all features, replacing irrigation and improving drainage. Managed turf would be reduced by 38 acres and drought and salt-tolerant paspalum grass would be planted throughout.

“450,000 cubic yards of off-site soil was used to raise the elevation of all turf areas so that salt intrusion from the sea-level nature of the site is no longer an issue with turfgrass health,” says Richardson.

At the same time, the layout was completely redesigned. “The fully rebuilt course was designed to be fun, flexible and interesting,” says Richardson. “Loops of holes within the routing allow playing formats of six, nine, twelve, fifteen or eighteen holes.”

The new course includes a number of rare features, such as a double green for holes three and fifteen and twin greens on the fourteenth hole.

The project transformed the landscape to a more indigenous palette of native palms. Five hundred naturally-occurring oak saplings have also been protected in the nearby Pearson Arastradero Preserve.

The completed course—rebranded as Baylands Golf Links—features 55 acres of native vegetation and wetland areas, a 40 percent reduction of managed turf areas and a 35 percent reduction of potable water use.

More than 10 acres of land has been added to the Baylands Athletic Center for future recreational use, and over seven acres converted into in-stream marshland terrace habitat, within the expanded San Francisquito Creek.

“This project has helped to provide economic sustainability, by restoring the ‘point of pride’ back to the city’s municipal golf asset,” says Richardson.

## Baylands Golf Links

**Location:**

Palo Alto, California

**Golf course architect:**

Forrest Richardson, ASGCA  
[www.golfgroupltd.com](http://www.golfgroupltd.com)

**Project summary:** Forrest Richardson, ASGCA, was hired to redesign the former Palo Alto municipal golf course, with a primary goal of widening the adjacent San Francisquito Creek to reduce the risk of flooding.

**Partners:** Wadsworth Golf Construction (construction); West Coast Turf (turf); Profile Products (soil amendments); Toro (irrigation); Ewing (irrigation); Better Billy Bunker (bunker liner)