



Image credit: NASA

[Download Image Here](#)

San Francisco Bay

Clouds off the Pacific West Coast hold short of California's most important ecological habitat in this image from August 6, 2017.

San Francisco Bay is a very dynamic and complex environment, starting with the water itself. Salt water from the Pacific Ocean flows in through the passage known as the Golden Gate; meanwhile, rivers and streams deliver a steady supply of fresh water drained from California's Central Valley. This brackish mix makes San Francisco Bay the largest estuary in the Pacific US.

The Bay has faced increasing environmental challenges ever since the 1848 Gold Rush. 80 percent of the original wetlands, amounting to 40 percent of the original Bay, have been backfilled to create new land in support of an exploding population. Mercury and other toxins released by gold mining operations continue to affect the surrounding watershed. More recently, fertilizers in the runoff from the Central Valley farmlands, and invasive species brought to the Bay's busy ports via global shipping traffic, have added to the Bay's troubles.

San Francisco Bay exemplifies the need to be good stewards of our natural resources. The good news is that efforts to restore wetlands and improve the overall health of the Bay are on the rise.

