

Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice



Photo courtesy of Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice



Founded in 1997 by grassroots community leaders, **Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice** has been at the forefront of the environmental justice movement for over 23 years.

Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice (Greenaction) is a multiracial grassroots organization that fights for health and environmental justice with low-income and working class, urban, rural, and indigenous communities. Founded in 1997 by grassroots community leaders, Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice has been at the forefront of the environmental justice movement for over 23 years. Greenaction has worked in Bayview Hunters Point since the organization was founded.



Project Description

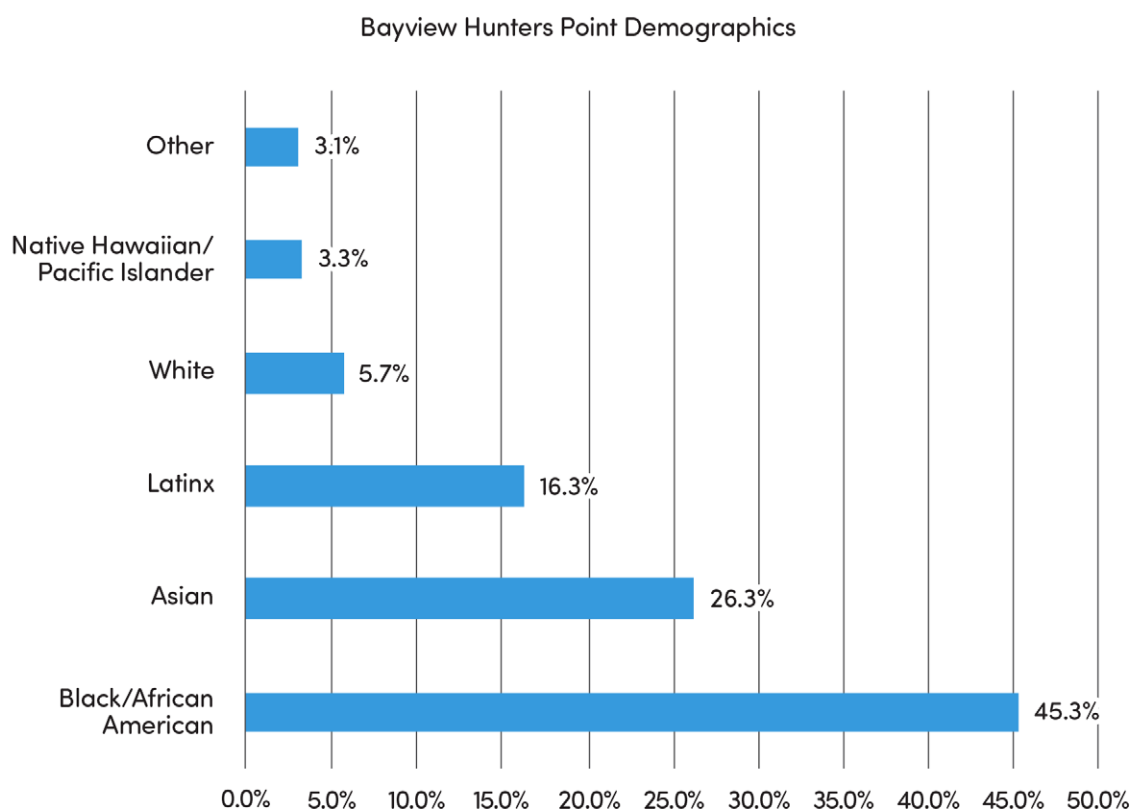
Greenaction worked with the Bayview Hunters Point community. Bayview Hunters Point is a low-income community of color located on San Francisco Bay in southeast San Francisco. Greenaction engaged with residents to define water management needs and related concerns as they manifest from the community's perspective. Greenaction staff have engaged in ongoing discussions, surveys, meetings, educational outreach, and presentations with diverse residents and other stakeholders, including community organizations, regulatory agencies and elected officials.

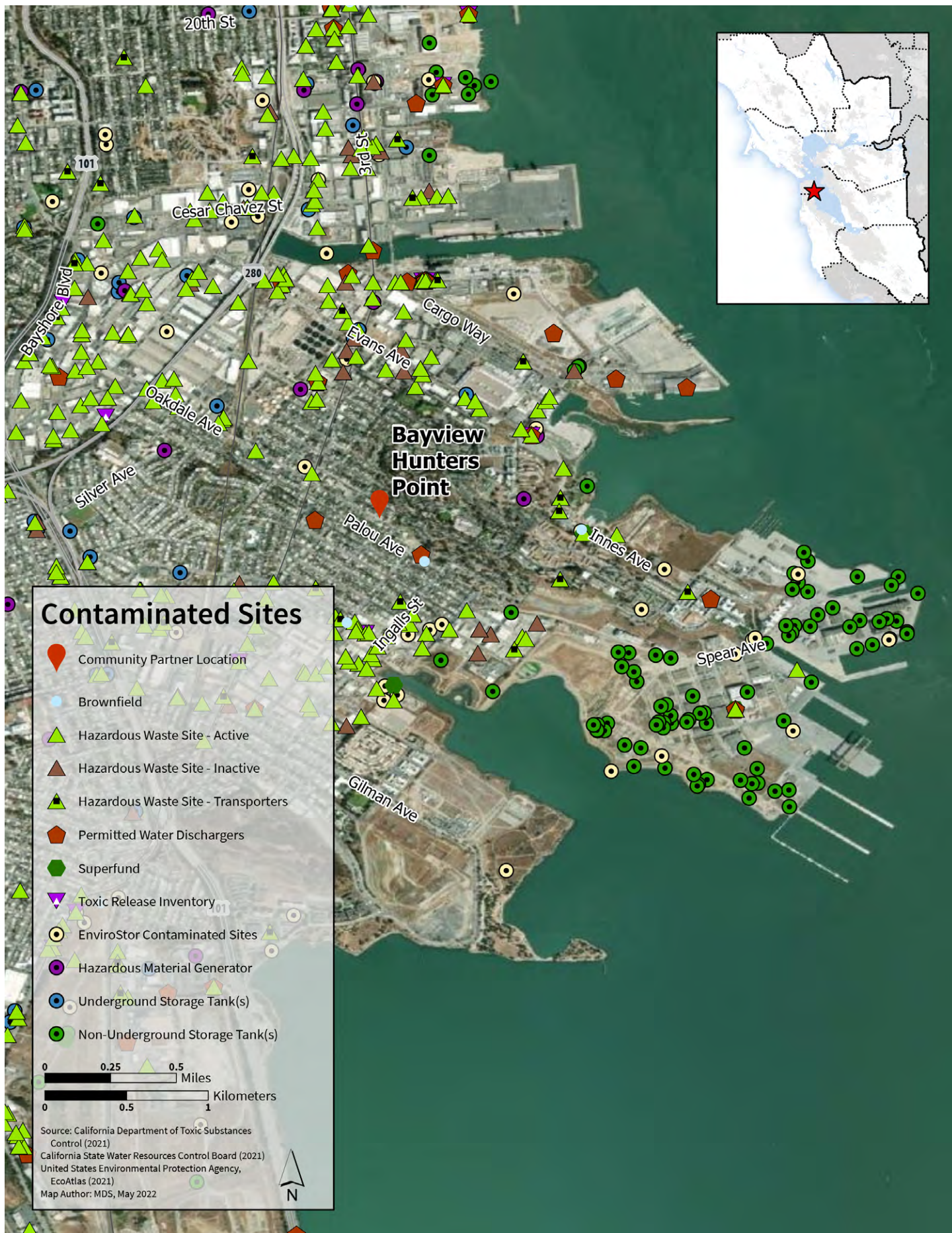
Background on Bayview Hunters Point

Demographics

Bayview Hunters Point has a population of 34,835, of which 45.3% identify as Black/African American, 26.3% Asian, 16.3% Latinx, 5.7% white, 3.3% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 3.1% Other. Bayview Hunters Point has an unemployment rate of 5%, compared with 3% for the entire city of San Francisco, and 21.2% of the population has income below the poverty level, compared with 11.3% for the whole of San Francisco (San Francisco Mayor's Office of Housing and Community Development).

Historically a predominantly African American neighborhood, Bayview Hunter Point has become increasingly diverse as other low income and working class people displaced from other neighborhoods have moved in. In addition, the community is facing gentrification and an increase in higher and upper income white residents.





History of Environmental Injustice and Inequity in Bayview Hunters Point

Bayview Hunters Point is a mix of industrial and residential zoning, often in the same areas. It is also home to the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard Superfund site, along with other contaminated sites and 187 leaking underground fuel tanks or LUFTs (Greenaction 2004). The various contaminated sites like Hunters Point Naval Shipyard as well as the LUFTs have caused contamination in the soil and groundwater (Greenaction 2004).

The residents and environment of Bayview Hunters Point are disproportionately impacted by many stationary and mobile pollution sources, including radioactive and toxic contamination at the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard Superfund site and dozens of other contaminated sites along the waterfront and throughout the community (Respaut and Levinson, Reuters 2019). Pollution sources include the Southeast Sewage Treatment plant, under-regulated and unregulated dirty industries, diesel freight transport, the Port of San Francisco, and two freeways. The California EPA's CalEnviroscreen ranks Bayview Hunters Point as one of the communities in the state that is the most at risk from and vulnerable to multiple sources of pollution. Bayview Hunters Point rates in the 90th percentile in CalEnviroscreen, meaning it has a higher pollution burden than 90% of California overall. For environmental factors, Bayview Hunters Point ranks in the 99th percentile for diesel particulate matter, 97th for groundwater threats, and 86th for hazardous waste. For health factors, Bayview Hunters Point ranks in the 97th percentile for low birth weight, the 96th for asthma, and 46th for cardiovascular disease. For population characteristics, Bayview Hunters Point ranks in the 97th percentile for housing burden, 88th for unemployment, and 60th for poverty (Greenaction, 2021). In addition, the area has often been used for illegal dumping.

Bayview Hunters Point is also vulnerable to sea level rise, which combined with storm surges could cause flooding of many of these hazardous and radioactive waste contamination sites and homes, transportation infrastructure, and utilities along the San Francisco Bay waterfront. Toxic materials and waste beneath the surface could be dredged up and exacerbate public health risk of the area (May et. al., 2020). As one example, Islais Creek, which runs through Bayview Hunters Point, was labeled a “toxic hot spot” by regulators in the 1990s, and still contains high levels of contamination (Mojadad, 2021). The artificial creek is expected to be five feet under water by 2050, which could cause industrial contaminants to seep out of the ground and flow out into the Bay (Mojadad, 2021). These hazardous materials will threaten human health and the environment. Additionally, subsistence fishers, lacking affordable healthy alternatives, eat toxic fish from the polluted San Francisco Bay.



Photo: U.S. Navy archive



Large mega-developments proposed for new upscale residents, such as the India Basin Mixed Use Development project, threaten to gentrify the community and would likely result in displacement of longtime residents and small family-owned businesses. In addition to displacement, the India Basin Mixed Use Development project is another example of a mega-development on toxic land — in this case, right next to the shipyard Superfund site. The San Francisco Board of Supervisors approved the India Basin Mixed Use Development project despite the Environmental Impact Report finding that the development would result in significant, unhealthy, ongoing, and unavoidable air pollution that would likely violate regulatory limits (Greenaction, 2019). Treasure Island is another example of contaminated land slated for upscale commercial and residential development.

Community-Identified Strengths and Assets

Community knowledge and civic engagement of residents is a strength and asset as they continue their decades-long efforts and campaigns to improve the quality of life, including environment and health, in this community that is acknowledged to be highly vulnerable and at risk from pollution and other health and socio-economic indicators.

Residents know their community better than anyone, including government “experts.”

Another key asset created by Greenaction’s and their Bayview Hunters Point community members and community partners is the Bayview Hunters Point Environmental Justice Response Task Force. The EJ Task Force is a multi-stakeholder, community-led problem solving collaboration that brings together residents, community and environmental justice groups, local/regional/state/federal government agencies, and some businesses. The EJ Task Force has monthly meetings, conducted virtually since the pandemic began, and they hope to be able to return to in-person meetings once health conditions allow them to meet safely.

One of the important successes of the EJ Task Force has been to catalyze increased attention to the chronic and serious problem of illegal dumping, as diverse community, government, and business stakeholders work together to try to address this issue.

Related to the EJ Task Force, Greenaction created a website, bvhp-ivan.org, which allows residents and other concerned people to easily and quickly report pollution violations and track the response (or lack thereof) by the appropriate regulatory agency. These complaints are then reviewed at the monthly EJ Task Force meetings with all the stakeholders, including government agencies.



Photo: Dennis Herrera



Photo: Dale Cruse

Needs Assessment Process

Summary of Outreach and Education Efforts

Greenaction reached over 2,000 community members through neighborhood and social media outreach, contacting them with surveys and fact sheets on illegal dumping, sea level rise, and cumulative health impacts/vulnerability to pollution. Greenaction staff engaged in conversations with and relationship-building in Bayview Hunters Point, including attending community and neighborhood meetings and gathering input from these events on community water needs. Greenaction updated, developed, and distributed new outreach materials including fact sheets on illegal dumping, sea level rise and contamination, healthy subsistence fishing, and how to file pollution complaints. Greenaction also maintained a close partnership and capacity building for the Bayview Hunters Point Mothers and Fathers Committee and stayed heavily involved in and made presentations about the project at two monthly meetings of the multi-stakeholder Bayview Hunters Point Environmental Justice Response Task Force. Greenaction also manages the Bayview Hunters Point Identifying Violations Affecting Neighborhood (IVAN) Program.

Greenaction developed and conducted two surveys and analyzed data from over 300 responses. The first survey (Bayview Hunters Point Community Surveys on Water Issues and Concerns) yielded 160 complete responses, and the second survey (Bayview Hunters Point Water Needs Assessment) yielded 150 complete responses. A third survey on subsistence fishing was planned but has not been completed yet due to COVID-19 restrictions and safety concerns.

Needs Assessment Findings

The priority issues identified through the needs assessment are drinking water quality, water/sea-level rise and groundwater rise, illegal dumping, contamination, and subsistence fishing.



Drinking Water



Trash and Litter



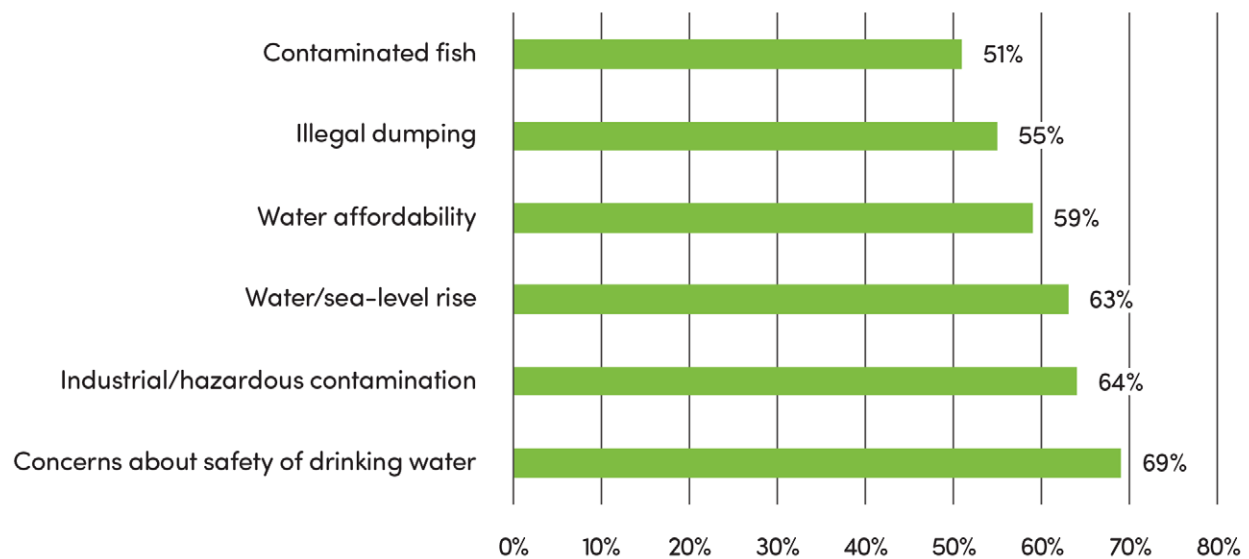
Flooding



Industrial Contamination

Respondents were asked which issues they have identified in their community. Notable findings include: 69% of survey respondents feel their drinking water is unsafe, 64% are concerned about industrial/hazardous contamination, 63% are concerned about water/sea-level rise, 59% are concerned about water affordability, 55% are concerned about illegal dumping, and 51% are concerned about contaminated fish.

Priority issues identified by the BVHP community



Next Steps

Greenaction has been holding discussions to prioritize issues and discuss identifying project development ideas based on the survey responses with the community and partners mentioned above.

As part of their work to identify project implementation ideas, Greenaction initiated a new coalition to bring together groups to work together and engage government agencies to address the threat posed by rising sea levels and groundwater to shoreline contamination sites. The mission statement for the group is: “The San Francisco Bay Shoreline Contamination Cleanup Coalition mobilizes for the safe, comprehensive, and immediate cleanup of all toxic and radioactive contamination near the SF Bay shoreline, where sea level rise due to climate change will spread the contamination. Climate and environmental justice is our highest priority.”

Some key project development ideas and next steps identified include:

- Working with community and government partners (including San Francisco Recreation & Parks, San Francisco Department of the Environment, and San Francisco Health Department) on creating and posting multilingual subsistence fishing health advisory signs along the San Francisco Bay waterfront in Bayview Hunters Point, Treasure Island, and throughout the San Francisco Bay region where subsistence fishing is an issue.
- Engaging with stakeholders on rising water/sea level rise issues facing Bayview Hunters Point.
- Finishing the third subsistence fishing survey and conducting a feasibility study to assist in project development concepts.
- Addressing unsafe water and affordability, including conducting a major water quality testing program in partnership with San Francisco Public Utilities Commission and other agencies in San Francisco—priority would be residents living in older homes, public housing, public/private housing, and other concerned residents.
- Implementing a multi-stakeholder project to address rampant and chronic illegal dumping in Bayview Hunters Point, including working with government and community partners to post signs warning against illegal dumping in problem areas and outreach about the dangers, stepping up monitoring of illegal dumping, and outreach on how to report violations through IVAN and directly to appropriate agencies.
- Working with government partners to assess what a water conservation educational and implementation effort in southeast San Francisco would entail.
- Conducting ongoing water quality monitoring near known contamination sites in Bayview Hunters Point and Treasure Island.
- Continuing to educate the community and work with the Bayview Hunters Point Environmental Justice Task Force and stakeholders on all these water related issues.

Potential partners include San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, San Francisco Department of the Environment, San Francisco Board of Supervisors, San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department, Bayview Hunters Point Environmental Justice Response Task Force, and community groups.

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