

**SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA WETLANDS RESTORATION PROGRAM
WETLANDS MONITORING GROUP**

**MEETING SUMMARY
DECEMBER 8, 2003**

Attendees:

Andree Breaux (San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board)
John Brosnan (Wetlands Restoration Program)
Steve Cochran (Friends of the San Francisco Estuary)
Josh Collins (San Francisco Estuary Institute)
Paul Jones (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)
Phil Lebednik (LFR Levine-Fricke)
Mike May (San Francisco Estuary Institute)
Luisa Valiela (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)

1. Introductions/Review Agenda

Andree Breaux opened the meeting as chair and opened with a round of introductions. Andree then asked for announcements. Steve Cochran noted the results from Snapshot Day 2003 - a statewide water quality monitoring event held in May - are now posted on the Coastal Commission's website. Steve said this year saw a very successful volunteer monitoring effort, with great data collected all along the California coast. This year saw about 640 volunteers.

Mike May said he would incorporate recent edits to the Project Data Transmittal form. Mike stated input from BCDC has been limited to comments received at the Wetland Tracker workshop. Josh suggested BCDC staff review the transmittal form. John Brosnan noted the Coordinating Committee will draft a letter to Mike Connor at SFEI and to Fritz Reid at the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture urging as much collaboration as possible between the SFEI Project Tracker and the new Joint Venture habitat tracking system. John also said the WRP recently underwent a Public Records Act request, which had been initiated by the Bahia Homeowners' Association.

2. Anticipated WRP Monitoring Group products

Andree mentioned her and Molly Martindale's work on the project data transmittal form and stated its intended use was a consistent means if project information being fed into the Wetland Tracker. Andree noted permit applicants would be asked to complete and submit the form, yet there is no mechanism for force applicants to do so. Mike May stated Molly has mentioned a specific person at the Corps who might be available for data entry. Phil Lebednik noted any task of the Monitoring Group should be prioritized based on the group's mission statement and objectives. Phil asked what does the WRP do? What does the Monitoring Group do within that? Phil stressed developing the group's plan and then work to show how we're accomplishing the objectives we've set forth.

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Josh Collins noted the San Francisco Estuary Project (SFEP) has \$15,000 for development of the Wetland Tracker, yet that money needs to be applied in a way that would benefit SFEP. SFEP needs a better ability to report wetlands gains and losses to EPA and track progress towards the Goals Report recommendations. Maggi Kelly (UC Berkeley) is working with a graduate student who will be assisting with these tasks. Josh stated SFEP was especially interested in latitude and longitude coordinates. Josh mentioned some additional funding that would be used to upload California Rapid Assessment Method (CRAM) data; Josh stated some wetland maps need to be added, which would come from the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI). Josh reiterated his desire to see some directive come from the Coordinating Committee to pursue the Tracker's ability to track project towards the Goals. Paul suggested it was time to resurrect the objectives and the mission statement used by the Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program (WRMP) for use in this group.

Josh noted that the aerial vegetation mapping workshop will be postponed until January.

Paul noted that some major players in wetlands restoration in San Francisco Bay do not attend these meetings, primarily those agencies heavily involved with the South Bay Salt Ponds restoration effort. Phil felt this group should help plugging monitoring into the South Bay process; Phil asked why such groups are not taking advantage of the coordination within this group. **Luisa noted the group could choose delegates from this group to attend the South Bay Salt Pond planning meetings.** Josh stated it would be best for this group to put its processes in play and then let those processes evolve organically. Josh recognized the benefit of this group establishing priorities for the Wetland Tracker, yet reminded the group that the mutualism is a commitment from SFEI and that fact needs to be recognized. Josh proposed, for example, SFEI could focus on the content of the Tracker while the WRP could focus on its presentation. Josh was eager to hear from this group and the Coordinating Committee what they felt were the best additions to the Tracker from the standpoints of the environment and improving management. Paul stated the first priority should be on minimizing duplication of efforts and inconsistencies. Paul felt this issue should be presented to the Executive Council. **John said he would circulate the WRMP mission statement and objectives for the group members to review.**

Andree asked the group for their ideas on establishing monitoring review teams. John expressed his concern that having too many reviewers on the DRG also serve on the Monitoring Group may cause reviewers too much work, which could possibly delay completion of either group's reviews. Josh felt this was a great idea and a good way of sharing the collective knowledge of the group. Paul noted the Monitoring Group could incorporate lessons learned from the DRG. **The group suggested John reach out to group members via email and seek commitments, in order to gauge the anticipated number of interested reviewers. Phil suggested John revisit the expected timeline of the project, the budget and the conflict of interest statement at the beginning of each project.** Paul proposed the group select a project for analysis at the next meeting; this review would not evaluate the project monitoring plan, but would reveal the steps required to complete a review and define the content to be evaluated. Josh agreed, stating the group should assess what the scope of a review consists of (he suggested the group revisit the federal guidelines of what a monitoring plan is supposed to contain). Josh saw several potential focuses for the group, such as what should be monitored, what is being monitored, how attributes are being measured, proper sampling methods and proper data interpretation.

Luisa noted monitoring plan review might require additional review beyond one presentation, similar to the approach currently undertaken by the DRG. Luisa felt that one opportunity to present project information would not allow for adequate dialogue and could, thus, frustrate some project proponents and plan reviewers. Josh saw no reason why project proponents could not come back more than once, as there were so many levels of review (e.g., basic review, plan review, key elements review, etc.). Phil noted monitoring plans might, in some cases, require substantially more time for review than the DRG takes to review a conceptual design plan. He felt this could be addressed by clearly defining review scope and articulating what information should be presented in project reviews. Paul noted that, as is the case in the DRG, review of a plan in the conceptual or developmental phase might have the most positive impact on the end product.

Josh advocated the DRG and the Monitoring Group be combined into one. This approach could allow for a more comprehensive project review of all projects that come to the group(s). **John was asked to discuss this option with DRG chair Mike Monroe and report back to the group.** Andree asked for potential projects and the group proposed Sonoma Baylands, Martin Luther King Jr. Regional Shoreline, Tolay Creek, Bair Island, Napa Floodplain, and Pond A4. Phil felt the possible combined group might better lead to an estuary-wide monitoring understanding. A questionnaire will be sent out to the WMP before the next meeting asking for opinions on whether:

- (1) the DRG and a new Monitoring Team should be combined;
- (2) there are good monitoring projects to evaluate at
 - (a) pre-monitoring plan stage;
 - (b) mid-project, i.e., monitoring projects that require adaptive management decisions after the monitoring has been done;
 - (c) the end of the project, i.e., completed projects that should be looked at for lessons learned from them;
- (3) the recipient is interested in participating on the Monitoring Review Team.

Andree suggested that the Audubon protocol used for birds at Martin Luther King be added to the existing protocols on SFEI's web site.

Andree asked the group for their thoughts on designating mitigation wetland site assessment teams. Paul said he saw the teams as an interagency panel of reviewers to assess permit compliance with regulatory and financial requirements. Paul had mentioned this concept at the recent national wetlands meeting held between the Corps of Engineers and the EPA. Paul noted Corps' San Francisco district staff was at least initial interest in this concept. Paul saw the team as including non-agency staff people, similar to the composition of the Monitoring Group. An annual report would serve as the end product and that report would be sent to the Corps and EPA. Paul stated sites would be randomly selected. Work would likely consist of two days and visits to as many as four sites, annually. Paul noted the potential for such work to place the regulated community (i.e., developers) on alert. Josh noted that - for purposes of random sampling - NOAA's EMAP sample selection software is now at SFEI.

3. Designating a Monitoring Group Steering Committee

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John noted this agenda item has been informally discussed within the DRG and the Monitoring Group for several months. He noted the Monitoring Group did have a defined steering committee when it was known as the Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program. Similarly, DRG participants have long talked of a "core" DRG, although one has never been defined. John stated that limitations imposed by compliance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) would limit steering committee participation to agency staff, yet the value of opinions and input from non-agency participants would not be diminished as a result. Either steering committee would be responsible with moving group recommendations up to the Coordinating Committee and the Executive Council. FACA would simply require that any recommendations coming from either group be traceable to a body solely composed of agency staff people. John wanted to make sure non-agency participants of the group do not feel relegated to a second tier as a result of this action; all group members can make suggestions and participate in group deliberations without restriction. The group agreed with the utility of this concept. In sum, the agencies will form the subcommittee and all participants can vote. Agencies will make recommendations to the Coordinating Committee and the Executive Council.

4. Monitoring Group Mission Statement and Operating Procedures

This topic will be revisited at the next meeting. In preparation for that, **John will circulate the WRMP mission statement and the WRMP objectives to the group.** These items will serve as the basis in development of the Monitoring Group's mission statement and operating procedures.

5. Review of action items and next meeting date

The next meeting date was set for Tuesday, February 3, at 1 P.M. The meeting was adjourned.