

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

**MEETING SUMMARY
JANUARY 21, 2003**

Attendees:

Andree Breaux (San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board)
Marcia Brockbank (San Francisco Estuary Project)
John Brosnan (Wetlands Restoration Program)
Josh Collins (San Francisco Estuary Institute)
Richard Looker (San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board)
Molly Martindale (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)
Mike May (San Francisco Estuary Institute)
Mike Monroe (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)
Nadav Nur (PRBO Conservation Science)
Gary Page (PRBO Conservation Science)
Stuart Siegel (Wetlands and Water Resources)
Eric Tattersol (California Department of Fish and Game)
Carl Wilcox (California Department of Fish and Game)

1. California Rapid Assessment Method (CRAM)

Molly Martindale chaired the meeting and asked Josh Collins to provide an update on development of the California Rapid Assessment Method (CRAM). Josh said that development of CRAM will initially focus on wetlands, including riparian and seasonal wetlands of the watersheds that drain the Coast ranges and Transverse Ranges of the State. Sierran, Central Valley, and Klamath, and desert wetlands will be addressed later. The CRAM is one Part of a three-part approach to wetland inventories and assessment developed by the U.S. EPA, with input from the NWI of USFWS. Level 1 is a GIS-based inventory; Level 2 is the Rapid Assessment Method (called CRAM in California), and Level 3 is the intensive site-specific science needed to substantiate Levels 1 and 2. CRAM is being funded through a Section 104 grant to ABAG for the Bay Area, through SCCRWP in Southern California, and Coastal Commission for the Central Coast. CRAM development involves a Core Team and three Regional Teams (South Coast, Central Coast, and Bay area-North Coast). The Core Team is developing core indicators that should apply to all wetland types throughout the state. The regional Teams will add regional modifiers.

Last week the core team met and went through their ideas of preliminary metrics, conceptual models and schedules. Josh stressed that the CRAM will be different than for other states because of our arid climate that increases the abundance of seasonal wetlands. The core team meeting produced four weeks of assignments for team members, leading up to the next formal workshop being held in southern California on February 19th and 20th. Josh hopes the team will have the draft core methodology complete before the conference and a draft scoring regime for the metrics complete in March 2003 (with calibration planned for the summer).

Josh reminded everyone that this is a method being developed here and that the application of it would have to involve agencies within this region. The question was then raised of taking this issue to the Management Groups of the Wetlands Restoration Program and the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project in order to raise awareness of CRAM.

2. Methyl Mercury Presentation

Richard Looker provided a brief background on the TMDL process; bodies of water listed on the 303(d) list of “impaired water bodies” are required to complete a TMDL – total daily maximum loads. The maximum loads are the total quantity that a water body can tolerate inputs of and still be able to sustain itself. TMDLs are plans that analyze potential sources that contribute to a body of water’s designation of “impaired”, set targets to lower those sources, and outline an implementation plan for recovery. The San Francisco Bay Mercury TMDL is due in February/March 2003; a TMDL amendment to the Basin Plan will come later during the year.

There is some concern about wetlands since they could be places where mercury is becoming methylated and so it is particularly important for the TMDL to understand the connections to wetlands (e.g. heavily vegetated wetlands tend correlate with more methylmercury). Patterns are becoming apparent in methylmercury (MeHg) loading in fish; monitoring may have underestimated the mercury inputs from atmospheric deposition. Mercury alone is not so much of a problem, but MeHg is a serious problem even in small quantities. Hot spots have been found to be very localized at times, down as small as one meter squared, and thus MeHg may be challenging to quantify on the landscape scale. A program to address all of these issues is critical.

Richard then asked if the WRMP is able to help with these issues. He stated that he will be championing these issues through Prop 13 grant funding and that Philip Lebednik (of Levine Fricke) is also working on this. Richard reminded the group that the report that was due out in February/March will not say much about wetlands, but it will address load allocations, a listing of issues, and best guesses of how to resolve the issues. Carl Wilcox reminded the group that there might be a methylization potential study performed on the South Bay salt ponds discharge; there will be sediment sampling performed to assess the sites’ methylization potential. It was suggested that the Wetlands Restoration Program could provide some initial coordination on this. Richard then added that MeHg-related papers from the recent CALFED conference were available online at CALFED’s website.

3. Focus and Form of the WRMP

Molly asked the group – What is the overall structure of this group? What should it be? What leadership will run this group over the long-term? Molly stated that the group has made much progress over the past four years, but that the group is not continuing along the path that it had idealized in the past. Molly added that, given the resources presently available to the WRMP, where should it go from here?

There was some concern over having non-agency members on the WRMP following Mike Monroe’s meeting with a lawyer from EPA; some people may be able to raise a flag regarding the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) given the inclusion of non-government employees

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on groups of the Wetlands Restoration Program. Nadav Nur stated that he has assumed the group was headed towards becoming a part of the Wetlands Restoration Program and pointed out that several “boxes” in the flow chart (one of Molly’s handouts) remain to be complete. Molly then asked the group – How do we want to accomplish these uncompleted goals?

Josh asked about the people that are setting the policy and directions for the WRMP (i.e., who act as the steering committee). Carl stated that there is need to provide a general and consistent mechanism for wetlands assessment and to develop those basic monitoring parameters that will be used to inform future management decisions. A more coordinated effort is needed to avoid the present scenario of numerous ad hoc committees. Josh resounded the need to collaborate with the Management Group to achieve direction. Collectively, members of the group agreed that the WRMP needed to be maintained.

Mike Monroe stated that he saw many resources in the WRMP, but agreed with the need for management-level direction. Mike suggested a potential subcommittee meeting with Management Group members and Monitoring Group members. Stuart Siegel also echoed the statements about management input, stating that it is necessary. Nadav stated that the South Bay salt ponds process requires a regional approach and that this group could be integral in that. Molly suggested someone should be appointed to work with John on this and on broader, WRMP-specific tasks. Josh stated that the Wetlands Restoration Program exists strongly in the minds of some people, but relative to the Monitoring Group, it must be packaged as a succinct approach to the Management Group (e.g., a rudimentary plan of investigations, protocols for project mapping and CRAM, etc.). Carl agreed and stated that something needs to be presented to the Executive Council; future projects need to be faced with a coordinated and consistent approach.

Andree Breaux asked about the development of rules for sample design; she said that the group could come up with sample monitoring design rules that people would use. Stuart said that this was the time to implement some internal adaptive management, and revisit those tasks on the flow chart to determine how these tasks fit into what needs to be done. The group seemed to agree that they would wait on a proposal to the Executive Council until its summer meeting. Josh guessed that packing all of this information for presentation to the Management Group might take 6-8 weeks.

Marcia Brockbank wondered about how Prop 13 monies could be worked in here; Richard said that proposals generally need to be geared towards wetlands and monitoring projects that comply with state guidelines and further state policies. Marcia reminded the group that the state is seeking to fund only large projects due to limited staff time. Mike May stated that the meeting of the subcommittee called out at the last WRMP meeting has not taken place in the last month; he added that there is not enough money to do a top-notch job. So, in other words, there is either enough money to complete the project with moderate quality OR complete the online mapping project very well. Molly suggested focusing more on the mapping project, in that case.

Mike Monroe raised the issue of having the WRMP set up to function somewhat like the Design Review Group (DRG), where projects could come to the group for review of the site-specific monitoring protocols and plans. Stuart said that this was a good idea; he added that relative to

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programmatic review, the WRMP needs a strategy to move forward with outside of meetings. Molly suggested reviewing the existing protocols and assessing present and next steps, with a focus on the mapping component. **For the next meeting, Molly suggested that everyone review the flowchart handed out and make comments. For each point, assess what it is, how it has been affected, and what's next.**

The group again expressed the need to have Management Group input; this input would plug some of the present holes in the WRMP structure and begin to think about future funding issues, among other things. Andree stated the protocols must be coalesced before moving forward. Molly suggested that the WRMP provide options to the Management Group for them to choose from. Josh stressed the need to think about aligning WRMP actions with the EPA Level 1, 2 and 3 approach; the group needs to determine if this structure is a good fit to the WRMP, as it could create certain in-roads with EPA and the State Board. Stuart expressed the need to have scientists ask articulate questions. **Josh suggested compiling a short synopsis of questions for the Management Group; these questions will come from the list/report that Josh will distribute to the WRMP via email. All WRMP members will mark their top 5 questions and bring them to the next WRMP meeting.**

Josh suggested that the online mapping project be presented at the next Management Group meeting.

At the next meeting, Mike May will provide a summary of what funding is left and what coordination is needed to complete the mapping effort.

The next meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, February 11, at the Regional Board.

The meeting was adjourned.