

Summary of the Meeting of the **Wetland Monitoring Group**, San Francisco Bay Wetland Restoration Program, held on **Monday, May 15, 2006** from 1:30 – 3:30 p.m. at 1515 Clay Street, Second Floor, Room 10, in Oakland, CA. 94612. (Notes by A. Breaux. Please send additions or corrections to: abreaux@waterboards.ca.gov by July 10, 2006.)

Present: Bob Batha & Steve Goldbeck (BCDC); Andree Breaux & Naomi Feger (SFB Water Board), Marcia Brockbank (SFEP); John Callaway (USF); Josh Collins & Mike May (SFEI); Phil Lebednik, LFR; Steve Ritchie (CCC); Louisa Valiela, US EPA.

State Water Quality Board's Compensatory Wetland Mitigation Study (J. Callaway).

John Callaway, co-author of the State Water Board's Compensatory Wetland Mitigation Study presented draft results of the study to determine whether California is achieving success with mitigation projects for impacts to wetlands. The study looked at 129 mitigation projects in CA for permit compliance and wetland condition based on the proportion of permits issued in each of the 9 Water Board Regions. USF assessed project in northern CA. and UCLA covered southern CA. The California Rapid Assessment Method (CRAM) was used at all sites and the northern CA sites also compared the CRAM method to the Wetland Ecological Assessment (WEA) method. Preliminary results show that overall average permit compliance was good throughout the State (84%), and mitigation requirements have been sufficient to compensate for lost wetland acres. However, wetland condition was lower than reference sites with only 19% of sites scoring optimal on the CRAM assessment; landscape context and hydrology had the lowest scores.

Region 2 (San Francisco Bay) scored the lowest with scores medium to low; Region 5 (Central Valley) scored the highest and also had the most mitigation banks assessed for any region. Region 2 scores for this study were quite different from one conducted by Region 2 staff in 2003 with the WEA method where the overall scores were medium to high, examining a different set of wetlands. Possible reasons for the different scores might be a bias against depression and estuarine wetlands (this theory has since been discarded); method differences; assessor bias; assessor experience; seasonal differences. Or, since the sites were different, the scores may simply be an accurate reflection of site conditions. The data will be looked at and perhaps some assessments run at new sites to determine why the two studies were different. The study concluded that CRAM is a useful method for assessing wetland mitigation sites.

Updates:

- Wetland Demonstration Project (J. Collins).

U.S. EPA money has been used to implement CRAM & Wetland Tracker. Each coastal Regional Board will get trained in CRAM. Three pilot watersheds (San Gabriel, Morro Bay, Napa) are assessing ambient conditions using CRAM and Wetland Tracker. The EPA Statewide Monitoring Grant has funding for 3 years for SQUIRP, SFEI, Moss Landing, & Harbor District of Humboldt Bay. On May 25th a public workshop for CRAM IT & Wetland Tracker will be held at the Water Board office in Oakland. All are invited.

SFEI will submit a full proposal to the State Consolidated Grant program proposing extension of the Wetland Tracker, CRAM, protocol development, and continued state-wide wetland inventories and intensive wetland monitoring. All of these elements can assist with a Wetland Regional Monitoring Program.

- Wetland Regional Monitoring Program (J.Collins & A.Breaux).

The group discussed a handout on draft comments from a SF Bay Water Board meeting discussing a Wetland Regional Monitoring Program for the region, similar to SFEI's Regional Monitoring Program for Trace Substances. The Water Board would like to encourage wetland restoration for non-mitigation projects by granting permits with the minimum of monitoring required for financially pressed public agencies such as CA. Department of Fish & Game, but with some assurance that restoration will take place as proposed. Suggestions were made to expand the management questions from an emphasis on contaminants to one on overall regional goals for wetland project monitoring for wildlife, landscape level features, and hydrology among other things. Management questions need to be answered directly. A regional approach to monitoring wetlands can be beneficial in tracking ambient conditions where just one entity (or a few, as opposed to every project) monitors appropriate stations (saves money; assures data quality and consistency); and in analyzing regional fluctuations of environmental indicators. A WRMP should be pursued in the SF Bay Region to encourage large-scale wetland restoration and to share the costs.

- Wetland Tracker (M.May).

SFEI and the SF Bay Water Board are close to finalizing the Wetland Tracker (WT) form and the language requiring its use in 401 permit condition letters. The WT will be tested in a pilot program in the region to determine if permit applicants can send accurate mitigation project information directly to SFEI to track crucial elements of mitigation projects such as their GIS locations, performance criteria, and monitoring elements.

SFEI is looking at how the Regions can use the data to monitor ambient conditions, reference sites, regional fluctuations; and provide adequate QA/QC and compatibility with CIWQS which is currently focusing on NPDES, not wetland, permits but expects to develop the wetland component soon. Habitat classification should be the same as the Corps which uses the National Wetland Inventory. Need to collaborate with Regions 1 and 2 to make definitions consistent with the proposed Stream/Wetland Policy. The Central Coast WT is collecting data from the Regional Board & the Corps. The WT must have QA/QC for data entry to be useful. Different jurisdictions have different buffer zones.

Adequate wetland project and habitat tracking with good QA/QC can be the beginning of an effective Wetland RMP.

SFEI is preparing for the upcoming CRAM workshop on May 25, 2006.

- BCDC's Proposed Peninsula Workshop (S. Goldbeck /B.Batha).

Should engineered structures such as peninsulas be used to increase sedimentation in tidal wetland restoration projects? There has been controversy about the extent to

which wind/wave energy can hinder restoration and how best to effectively distribute sediment in new tidal marsh projects. The effectiveness of peninsulas at Sonoma Baylands cannot be determined yet because not enough tidal water is getting to the site. Over a million dollars will be spent to build similar (but lower) peninsulas at the Hamilton Restoration site, but we are not sure of their effectiveness.

Because of this uncertainty, a proposal to spend about \$2,000 of WMG funds to get advice from 3-4 experts outside the region was discussed. The goal is not to find a solution to the problem but merely to discuss whether or not there is an issue and, if so, possible approaches to address it. New projects such as the Hamilton site should be designed with an experiment built in to test the efficacy of engineered structures to enhance sedimentation. The focus of the workshop may include how to provide actual design experiments for projects like Hamilton or Sonoma Baylands. Steve Goldbeck will investigate how best to define the problem and will send a problem statement to the WMG for review. He will also be looking for names of experts that might attend.

Next Meeting: **Tuesday, December 5th, 2006 from 1:30 to 4 p.m.**

Please send suggested agenda items to A. Breaux at abreaux@waterboards.ca.gov or 510-622-2324. All are welcome.