

Summary of Wetland Monitoring Group Meeting held Tuesday, May 5, 2009

The meeting was held at the Water Board office, 1515 Clay Street, Oakland, CA

Attendees included: Joy Albertson, Cheryl Strong, & Meg Marriott (US FWS); Mike May, Josh Collins, & Meredith Williams (SFEI); Steve Ritchie & Marilyn Latta (SCC); Peggy Olofson (Spartina Project); Arthur Feinstein (CCCR); Phil Lebednik (LFR Arcadis); John Bourgeois (H.T. Harvey); Paula Trigueros, Judy Kelly, & Karen McDowell (SFEP); Tim Stevens (DFG); Bob Batha (BCDC); Andree Greenberg & Naomi Feger (Water Board); Julian Wood (PRBO)

1. Steve Ritchie, of the California Coastal Conservancy and Executive Director of the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project gave a presentation on the *South Bay Salt Pond Project: Restoration, Monitoring, and Research* in which he described the opportunities and challenges of this large restoration project. Phase 1 will restore 3,000 acres of salt ponds to managed ponds and tidal wetlands, leaving up to 12,000 more acres to be restored to tidal marsh and other habitats in the future. Construction has already started on some of the ponds. Monitoring and some experimentation will assess water and sediment quality, contaminants, wildlife use and preferences, habitat development and other important features of wetlands and managed ponds. Despite some setbacks caused by the frozen state bonds which have held up many environmental and other projects, the South Bay Salt Pond Project is proceeding according to schedule and is expected to be funded by continuing grants and public and private programs. Requests for proposals to conduct required research for the project went out in 2008 and 2009, and the selected studies are underway. The approximately 15,100 acre project is expected to restore a vast amount of tidal wetlands to their original natural condition which will provide water quality improvement, habitat for special status and other native species, flood storage areas, and recreational opportunities. Contact: sritchie@scc.ca.gov. Website: <http://www.southbayrestoration.org/>

2. Cheryl Strong of the U.S. FWS presented additional South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project information about studies and monitoring to protect the endangered snowy plover, to determine human impacts on wildlife, to investigate the alarming increase of California gulls in the San Francisco region, and other research and monitoring projects. Contact: Cheryl_strong@fws.gov

3. Mike May of SFEI gave an update on the Wetland Tracker (WT), which is a web-enabled database that is designed to track net loss and gain of wetland and riparian habitats, and is also capable of storing vast amounts of project information. The WT continues to be improved to make it more user-friendly for agencies and the public. SFEI works with the Region 2 Water Board to require use of the WT as a certification condition; required information is then available to the public on the website. SFEI is also working with the State Water Board to develop a theme-based wetland information

portal, and a pilot 401 on-line application form. In response to some questions from the meeting attendees, Mike noted the possibility of making 401 applications available on-line for public viewing and comment and for notifying the public of new applications. Mike notes that construction and monitoring start and stop dates are available for some projects and will be added to others as they become known. Contact: mmay@sfei.org. Website: see <http://www.wetlandtracker.org>

4. Josh Collins and Meredith Williams of SFEI presented an update on the State's Wetland Monitoring Tool Kit. The State Water Board is working with other agencies and regional Water Boards to develop a Stream and Wetland Protection Policy that includes wetland and riparian definitions, delineation methods, mapping and inventory guidelines, rapid assessment methods, and standardized protocols for detailed monitoring. The proposed wetland definition is likely to be similar to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers', though it may include unvegetated wetland areas; riparian areas may be more extensive than the current Corps' jurisdictional areas; and the monitoring program will emphasize regional data centers, the use of existing programs, public access to data, and a watershed focus. The preferred rapid assessment method is the California Rapid Assessment Method (CRAM) which has passed the Army Corps' peer review and is currently being peer reviewed for the State Water Board. Trainings for the method are now available. A new report titled "California Wetland Demonstration Project" is available on the WRMP website at www.wrmp.org. Contact: josh@sfei.org or meredith@sfei.org

5. Peggy Olofson of the Invasive Spartina Project (ISP) gave a status report on the baywide efforts to remove all invasive cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) and its hybrids from the San Francisco estuary and its wetlands. The ISP has been funded by bond money managed by the California Coastal Conservancy for about 5 years and has been successful at eradicating most of it. The ISP has worked with wildlife, water, and other regulatory and natural resource agencies to ensure that special status species and other wildlife or aquatic organisms are not harmed by herbicide applications. Five years of data on the endangered California Clapper Rail (CCR) are being analyzed and there is as yet no clear connection between marshes sprayed with herbicides and CCR populations, compared to reference marshes. Monitoring and spraying are proceeding but the state bond freeze has slowed efforts and may have caused the program to lose a couple of years. The ISP control program had gotten invasive cordgrass down to about 10% of its original high amount, and the ultimate goal is still complete eradication. Contact: prolofson2@earthlink.net. Website: <http://www.spartina.org/>

6. Arthur Feinstein of Citizens to Complete the Refuge proposed that a 2-day weekend CRAM workshop to instruct citizens and volunteer monitors on the rapid assessment method be held in the fall for 50-75 people. SFEI will coordinate the speakers and the Joint Venture will manage the advertising and logistics. Approximately \$1,000 might be needed from the WMG budget (see item #7). Proposed sights for the weekend workshop are Martin Luther King restoration project in Oakland; Coyote Hills, Palo Alto Baylands, Richmond Field Station. For other location ideas or information, contact Arthur. Contact: arthurfeinstein@earthlink.net

7. Andree Greenberg of the Water Board proposed that the \$8,000 for the 2009 WMG Budget be spent as follows: \$3,000 for the wetland tracker intern; \$2,000 for SFEI to maintain the WMG (or WRMP) website and assist with the WT; \$1,000 to Citizens to Complete the Refuge for the CRAM Workshop for citizens and volunteers. The remaining \$2,000 should be reserved for the wetland tracker intern. The only new item here was the \$1,000 for the CRAM workshop which was approved by the group. If anyone has ideas for wetland Monitoring Review Team projects that would benefit from review before, during, or after permits are issued, please send them to Andree for 2010 or, if the \$2,000 reserved for the wetland tracker intern is not needed in 2009, wetland monitoring projects could be reviewed this year. Contact:

agreenberg@waterboards.ca.gov

8. Marilyn Latta of the CA. Coastal Conservancy provided an update on the Subtidal Goals Project which will recommend preservation, restoration, or research for nine types of subtidal habitats in the San Francisco Bay. There are currently three subtidal goals projects investigating shell fish (UC Davis), native eelgrass (SF State), and creosote pilings (SFEI). The final goals were temporarily delayed due to the bond freeze and are now expected in 2010. The newsletter and website will be restored when the frozen bond funds are made available.

She also discussed the need to incorporate subtidal design elements and sea level rise into wetland restoration projects. She raised the following question: what wetland restoration design elements such as tidal regimes, channel shapes, target vegetation – should be incorporated into subtidal projects, especially with the threat of sea level rise which could turn current wetlands into subtidal habitats – how can we plan for that? If anyone has ideas for wetland and subtidal habitat designs which will accommodate sea level rise, or for suitable monitoring or experiment locations with existing or planned subtidal habitats, please contact Marilyn. Locations suggested at the meeting included Montezuma, Lower Tubbs Island, Cullinan Ranch, Skaggs Island (which is in the early planning stages), and South Bay Salt Pond Project. Contact: mlatta@scc.ca.gov. Website: <http://sfep.abag.ca.gov/subtidalhabitatgoals.html>.

9. The State of the Estuary Conference will be held on Sept 29, 30, & October 1, 2009 in Oakland. The theme this year is “Our Actions, Our Estuary”. Information on the conference is available at <http://sfestuary.org>. Karen McDowell suggested that anyone interested in working on teams to select speakers for the conference should contact her at KMcDowell@waterboards.ca.gov. Posters are invited by the public on any environmental or scientific research, teaching, planning or other Estuary-related project. The deadline for poster abstracts is July 17, 2009. For information contact Andree at agreenberg@waterboards.ca.gov.

Next Meeting: **Tuesday, December 8, 2009 1:30- 4 p.m.** at the Water Board, 1515 Clay Street, Oakland. Please send suggestions for agenda items or comments on these notes to Andree Greenberg at agreenberg@waterboards.ca.gov.