

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

**MEETING SUMMARY
MARCH 9, 2004**

Attendees:

Bob Batha (San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission)
Andree Breaux (San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board)
John Brosnan (Wetlands Restoration Program)
Paul Jones (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)
Phil Lebednik (LFR Levine-Fricke)
Mike May (San Francisco Estuary Institute)
Mike Monroe (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)
Alex Naughton (Soils scientist)
Nadav Nur (PRBO Conservation Science)
Gary Page (PRBO Conservation Science)
Chris Potter (California Resources Agency)
Stuart Siegel (Wetlands and Water Resources)
Luisa Valiela (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)

1. Introductions/Review Agenda

Andree Breaux reviewed the agenda and asked for announcements. John Brosnan provided updates on action items from the previous Monitoring Group meeting. John noted he and Andree are participating in the South Bay Salt Ponds Stakeholder Forum's Habitat Restoration workgroup and will serve as the Monitoring Group's liaisons to the process. John noted he send out the WRMP's Mission Statement and Statement of Need to the group for their review. John and Andree have talked with Mike Monroe (chair of the DRG) about potentially holding joint DRG/Monitoring Group reviews; the three determined this would be acceptable, yet appropriate on a project-by-project basis. John said he distributed a questionnaire asking for Monitoring Group members' opinions on volunteers to serve as project reviewers, potential projects for review and on holding joint DRG/Monitoring meetings; no responses were provided and these items were included in the current meeting's agenda. Andree noted Josh Collins and Diana Stralberg coordinated the Vegetation Mapping Protocol workshop, which was held in late February. Stuart Siegel added the channel mapping protocol component of that workshop was not as ready for general use. Stuart said a better approach might be to establish a few channel mapping protocols and provide a "meta-protocol" that would help an interested party select one, although he stressed avoiding "telling" people what to do. Luisa Valiela said EPA wetlands grant preproposals are due March 19.

John stated the Design Review Group recently completed the National Park Service's Big Lagoon Creek and Wetland Restoration (Muir Beach, Marin County) Letter of Review. John added the DRG is actively seeking new projects for review and that the group will send out survey forms to past project proponents in order to gage their views on the overall DRG process. John stated the Coordinating Committee is meeting Thursday, March 11 and will be

discussing the responses to their letter urging greater collaboration between the developing San Francisco Bay Joint Venture Habitat Tracking system and the San Francisco Estuary Institute Wetland Tracker. The Committee will also review a draft outline of the WRP's first Annual Report and begin planning for the spring/summer 2004 Executive Council meeting.

2. Monitoring Group Mission Statement and Objectives

John reminded the group of the last meeting's action item, which was to send out the WRMP mission statement and objectives. John stated the WRMP mission statement and objectives had to be updated to reflect the roles and objectives of the WRP Monitoring Group. John then reviewed the WRMP mission statement and objectives, the WRP Monitoring Group objectives (as listed in the WRP Charter of Working Principles) and the list of succinct objectives recently contributed by Phil Lebednik.

Nadav Nur pointed out the WRMP consciously decided to become the WRP Monitoring Group. Stuart said the objectives need to be updated to address the present needs; Bob Bath felt the final document need list only a statement of needs or objectives, yet not both. Nadav stated the statement of need could be long-term, while objectives may be attained in the short term. He added if the group intends to be specific in its objectives, it needs a more comprehensive list. **He suggested adding an objective to reflect identifying parameters to measure restoration success.** He saw the Monitoring Group as working to increase the knowledge of what makes a project successful. **Stuart felt the objectives need to link back to the Design Review Group process, in order to accurately target restoration in the appropriate places. Gary Page suggested changing the action word in the mission statement from "provide" to "promote" and listing "aquatic habitats" or "wetlands and related habitats" over "wetlands".**

Andree asked if the group wanted to see the mission statement, the statement of need and the objectives all within one standalone document. Nadav advocated for maintaining all three. Group members provided several clarifying comments. Phil advised all objectives relate back to the statement of need. **Stuart suggested clarifying that restoration outcomes are different in fact from in perception and incorporating a feedback loop into the problem statement.** Bob suggested adding that the group seeks to promote successful projects and seeks to make sure that all projects perform well. Stuart proposed, "Improve our understanding of the processes that affect restoration project outcomes" as the last objective on the bulleted list. **John said he would distill all of the comments into a new document and circulate that to group members for review.**

3. Monitoring Plan Review Teams

Andree reiterated the Monitoring Group's long-standing intention to create monitoring plan review teams, which would be similar in function to the design review teams of the Design Review Group. She noted the Sonoma Baylands monitoring report as the first project ready for review and seen by group members as a good first project. Andree stated the Sonoma Baylands monitoring report by Phillip Williams and Associates is scheduled for release at the end of March. Eric Joliffe at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who is managing the monitoring for Sonoma Baylands, is aware of the Monitoring Group's interest in forming its first monitoring plan review team to review this report. Eric intends to distribute the monitoring report and

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then schedule a workshop to review it at the end of April. The workshop's date has not yet been set. Andree stated, as planned right now, the pilot monitoring plan review team would attend this workshop instead of featuring the project proponent for a separate presentation. Andree also mentioned the Monitoring Group's recently released Request for Qualifications (RFQ) calling for individuals to staff these review teams; Andree noted that review team members who'd like to be compensated for their time much complete and submit a Statement of Qualifications (SOQ) in response to the RFQ.

John added the San Francisco Estuary Project has designated funds for the Monitoring Group to complete about two reviews. John said the RFQ was completed in accordance with Association of Bay Area Government (ABAG) specifications, as ABAG is the fiscal agent for the San Francisco Estuary Project. There is a 30-day timeline on the RFQ, which was done in order to prompt participants to get their SOQs in as quickly as possible. The RFQ will be reposted as a continuous filing following the expiration of the 30-day timeline. Applicants may elect to serve as volunteer reviewers if they're interested in that. Acceptable applicants will be added to a prequalified list and review team members will be selected from that list to staff review teams. Any Monitoring Group members who are on the prequalified list for the Design Review Group will need to resubmit to be on monitoring review teams. (The RFQ is available on the WRP website at <http://www.sfwetlands.ca.gov/>)

Phil Lebednik stated there might be a closer link between the review of monitoring plans and the critiquing of regulatory guidelines or mandates. Andree responded that the scope of the review would include evaluating what was included in the original monitoring plan against what's working and not working. She proposed focusing on what will get the site to where it needs to/is supposed to be. Stuart asked if this feedback would translate into the Corps' revising the monitoring plan and Andree stated that, as with the DRG, the project proponent doesn't have to incorporate all of the review team feedback. Paul Jones expressed the need to maintain clear boundaries between feedback and providing the semblance of regulatory guidance. He echoed the concept that the group's feedback is for the benefit of the proponent. Bob Batha felt there needed to be a clear understanding of what the proponent is expecting. Bob added that regulatory agencies would likely treat Monitoring Group recommendations as they do DRG recommendations; where ever feedback would likely lead to a more successful project, it will be incorporated. Especially if feedback equates to greater cost effectiveness, it is more likely to be incorporated. Andree stated that this concept of providing feedback and seeing it utilized advances the group towards promoting adaptive management.

Stuart saw the DRG process, by comparison, as more clear-cut; the group looks at designs and provides comments in order to lead to a more successful habitat. With monitoring plans, there is a wider variety of elements to comment on. Stuart advised drawing a clear picture, early on, of the advice the group is trying to provide to the Corps. Andree felt that review of the Sonoma Baylands monitoring plan should answer the question of whether or not the main unit's main channel should be mechanically widened. Andree saw the review as considering what has happened at the site since construction and addressing how the plan envisions site development and assessing the proposed approach to achieve that vision. Andree felt it was important to understand whether or not the project was on target with what was expected to evolve at the site; she said this is especially important as permitting and plan preparation gets underway for the South Bay Salt Ponds process. Nadav saw the group distinguishing its

reviews into two broad categories; review of established monitoring plans and review of proposed plans. Paul felt the group's review of monitoring plans would provide a broader perspective and the general benefit of independent review for the community as a whole. John said the initial review of Sonoma Baylands would answer some questions about how the group will function in the review capacity, but will also create questions that will need to be answered. John saw the process of developing a review framework as a lengthy one and referred to the DRG, which took several months to reach agreement on standard operating procedures. Phil felt that getting clear instruction on desired feedback from the proponent would be equally as important in monitoring plan review as it is in the DRG reviews. Gary Page felt there may be some monitoring plan review questions that come to the Monitoring Group that may be better left to the DRG.

John noted he will be in contact with the group as materials for the Sonoma Baylands review become available and when the review process begins for monitoring review plan team member selection gets underway.

4. Compensatory Mitigation Review Teams

Paul Jones noted the increased emphasis being placed on review of the success of compensatory mitigation projects, with directives coming from top federal officials. Paul stated recommendations in the recently released National Research Council Report on compensatory mitigation led to the national mitigation action plan. One central component of the of this action plan is increasing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's review of compensatory mitigation projects. Corps' management has directed Corps' district staff to devote 20% of their time to review the outcomes of compensatory mitigation projects. Paul pictured establishing teams to visit 6-8 sites per year to assess compliance with plans and assess the ecological services being provided at the sites. Paul mentioned the notion of forming EPA/Corps Compensatory Mitigation Review Teams at the recent national wetlands meeting held between the Corps of Engineers and the EPA; Paul noted the Corps is interested in investigating both compliance and ecological functions at sites. Paul envisioned a simple start to the teams, which could then ramp up to include data collection and management tools, which could include the use of the California Rapid Assessment Method (CRAM). Working with staff at the Corps' San Francisco district office, Paul expected the preliminary group to begin field visits in April of this year, with subsequent trips in July and October.

5. California Rapid Assessment Method (CRAM) update

Paul stated that CRAM is currently is Version 2.0, or calibration, in the Bay Area, the Central Coast and the Southern California teams. There is a core team meeting scheduled in Sacramento over March 16 and 17 to review calibration results; the results of this review are expected to address whether scoping works. A draft document of calibration results is available at www.wrmp.org for review (under Program Documents).

6. CALFED IRWM Update

Stuart said the Suisun Marsh Workshop was held in Sacramento on March 1 and 2. The goal of the workshop was to bring science to the resource managers in the marsh and the workshop

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was broadly attended, although there were not as many local landowners in attendance. Stuart said more than 90% of the meeting's goals were met. A synthesis report will be available on the Bay-Delta Consortium's website in the coming months. Stuart said several big picture resource management questions have yet to be addressed.

Stuart stated the Integrated Regional Wetlands Monitoring pilot project is posting its data as it becomes available (at www.irwm.org, online). At present, the bird, invertebrates, primary production and fish teams are collecting data and making it available. The study covers a broad geographic area and encompasses several different sites. As such, various data collection methods are being utilized in order to seek out the most appropriate collection methods.

7. Review of action items and next meeting date

As a final announcement, the California chapter of the Estuarine Restoration Federation is meeting at Bodega Bay on March 23 and 24; the 24th will cover wetlands restoration. Andree noted that John would circulate the revised mission statement to the group. The next meeting date was set for Tuesday, May 11, at 1 P.M. The meeting was adjourned.