

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

**MEETING SUMMARY
MAY 11, 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)
Steve Cochran (Friends of the San Francisco Estuary)
Paul Jones (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)
Molly Martindale (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers)
Mike May (San Francisco Estuary Institute)
Mike Monroe (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)
Stuart Siegel (Wetlands and Water Resources)

1. Introductions/Review Agenda

Andree Breaux chaired the meeting and opened with a review of the agenda. Bob Batha noted the plan for the Napa-Sonoma Marshes was scaled back from nine ponds to including only three. Army Corps of Engineers federal headquarters suspended a large amount of funding, which would have paid for a recycled water pipeline that would import water for desalinating the ponds. Group members felt the incomplete monitoring plan for the project was insufficient – especially if the U.S. ACOE plan can no longer be adopted -- given the gravity of this project and its potential implications and lessons for the South Bay Salt Ponds project.

2. WRP Report

John Brosnan stated that he sent the WRP draft Annual Report to Monitoring Group members and asked them to comment on the document, with particular emphasis on the Monitoring Group section. John noted the document was being prepared in advance of the June 9 Executive Council meeting, where the Annual Report will be presented. John noted the WRP continues to seek long term funding; current funds for the WRP Coordinator position will expire in September 2004.

Stuart Siegel suggested adding the West Coast EMAP project and the vegetation and channel-mapping workshop to the Annual Report; Paul Jones suggested adding SFEI's fragmentation work. Stuart suggested adding the Suisun science workshops to the Report, and Paul Jones suggested adding the Montezuma Technical Review Team (John to follow up with Josh Collins for further details). John then reviewed the draft Executive Council meeting agenda; agenda items include presentation of the Annual Report, a discussion of the long-term funding for the WRP, and presentations on West Nile Virus, the Invasive Spartina Project, and the South Bay Salt Ponds project. Andree was glad to see the Executive Council addressing these interrelated issues. Group members noted the Spartina Symposium taking place in November, and wondered who was charged with planning the conference. Paul and Stuart agreed the issue

needs both big picture contexts as well as a balanced scientific presentation of the pros and cons of management and control of invasive Spartina.

3. Update on Monitoring Plan Review Teams

Andree noted the monitoring report for the Sonoma Baylands project has been delayed and should be available to the monitoring review team in early June, with the plan presentation to occur another few weeks later. Andree noted that five people responded to the Request for Qualifications to staff the monitoring review teams and all were placed on the pre-qualified list; all five people can be compensated for their time on the monitoring plan review teams. Andree noted the five applicants represent a broad spectrum of expertise. Stuart noted the North Parcel project, which was mitigation for the loss of seasonal wetlands at the Sonoma Baylands site (the site is located just across Highway 37, north of the Sonoma Baylands site). Stuart noted the site was constructed last winter and has been very successful at ponding water as it was intended to. **Stuart asked why the Monitoring Group does not address issues in Suisun marsh, and Andree asked him to give a 15-minute, overview presentation on Suisun issues for next time.**

4. Wetlands Assessments Updates

Paul stated the core team developing the California Rapid Assessment Method (CRAM) met in mid-March to review Version 2.0, or calibration. Specifically, he noted that some questions remain about how to approach rapid assessment of vernal pools (where vegetation layers are structurally different from other wetlands) and addressing some broader policy issues. Paul noted an implementation subcommittee has been formed to discuss creating a CRAM manual and to address the regulatory implications for CRAM's use; the first meeting of this subcommittee will occur soon. Paul also noted each of the three regional teams - the San Francisco Estuary Institute in the Bay Area, the Coastal Commission on the Central Coast, and the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project in Southern California - are being asked to submit full proposals to U.S. EPA's Wetlands Program Development Grants. The Wetland Tracker pre-proposal for the Wetlands Program Development Grants is also being advanced to the full proposal round; the Wetland Tracker grant was the highest rated preproposal in this year's grant cycle.

Paul stated the Compensatory Mitigation Review Team is progressing and the group went on their first site visit in Fairfield; the group was comprised of staff from U.S. EPA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Overall, the team intends to make about 6 site visits per year on a quarterly basis. The site visited is a .65-acre emergent marsh and the team used a 3-parameter assessment; overall, the visit proved the site to be successful in meeting its criteria. Mike Monroe asked how the sites were selected, and Paul noted the Corps' project management chose them. Andree noted that in her work with the Wetlands Ecological Assessments, the twenty sites reviewed were randomly selected in order to avoid any bias toward good or bad projects. Andree added that Josh Collins would be conducting CRAM testing at the same twenty sites during this year and evaluating how the two assessment methods' scores compare. Molly noted that in order for the compensatory mitigation review teams to conduct stratified random sampling, a comprehensive list of projects would first need to be developed.

5. Wetland Tracker

Mike May noted that for all projects already listed on the Wetland Tracker, any associated report, photograph or other file can be directly uploaded to the site; all requests to add a new project must first be sent to him. Mike restated the EPA Program Development Grant preproposal for the Tracker has advanced to the second round and they will submit a full proposal. The EPA grant request was for \$160,000 along with various matches; all funding will go to improve the Tracker and to hire staff to maintain the system. Mike referred to the data transmittal form, which would be filled out by permit applications and submitted as a voluntary part of the permit application process with the Regional Board, the Corps and BCDC. Mike, Molly and Andree have prioritized completion of the data transmittal form and initiating the flow of information (i.e., completed forms) from the Corps and the Board is the primary concern. Molly noted they'd ask permittees to fill out the form when the permit is completed, which is when the details would be most finalized. Molly stated that completing the form for a new project would at least get its location and basic project information listed on the Tracker; she stated that Corps' clerks could translate permit decisions into the form. Mike and Molly agreed the fewer people entering the data, the better.

Stuart suggested the habitat definitions should be evaluated and Paul suggested that perhaps they should be altered to reflect HGM classifications. Mike Monroe suggested establishing a steering committee for the Tracker. Everyone agreed that regulators as well as the public would use the system, and these intended users should help oversee the system's expansion. **Mike May noted he would send the revised form with its original definitions to the group for comment. Mike Monroe suggested John especially highlight the Tracker in the WRP Annual Report; this system is the best regional means of quantifying wetlands acreage gains and losses.**

6. North Bay and South Bay Salt Ponds Updates

Andree stated the Regional Board was supposed to permit the North Bay Ponds at its May meeting, but the agenda item was postponed until June. Andree added CDFG would like to roll back the monitoring plan to monitoring only three of the ponds, which concerned her as this project held much potential for lessons learned in the South Bay Salt Pond project. Stuart noted ground rectification of aerial monitoring is critical at the site and not too expensive. The group generally agreed there was much value in monitoring every year, opposed to every other year but also recognized that limited funding will force choices between spatial and temporal monitoring of different parameters. Paul felt the critical issues were monitoring to ensure the project meets its goals and objectives and that the project's monitoring should be reflective of similar levels of monitoring for comparable projects. Stuart felt that before proposing what would be the best approach to monitoring at the site, the group needed to consider what the project is seeking to learn and where the data will go; Stuart proposed putting a monitoring plan review team for the project. Stuart proposed making the linkages among the project's overall objectives, monitoring objectives and potential implications for the South Bay Salt Ponds. Bob suggested the monitoring plan focus on what areas are colonizing more rapidly, where and why.

Andree said she would contact staff at CDFG and assess their interest in bringing the Napa Ponds monitoring plan for review by the monitoring review teams. Several group members

felt that such a review would lead to a monitoring plan that the agencies were more likely to approve. Paul felt the lessons learned from Carl's Marsh, Tolay Creek, Sonoma Baylands and the Napa Floodplain project could provide good insight into the Napa Ponds' monitoring plan. Stuart felt the Conservancy might be interested in funding some additional monitoring, given the potential ramifications for adaptive management of the South Bay Salt Ponds. Paul felt this issue needed a clear linkage from the Monitoring Group to the Coordinating Committee to the Executive Council, with the message being there is too little monitoring being done at this site and that money for the effort is critical. **The group suggested the Executive Council needs to be made aware of these issues, what the WRP is doing about it and that they may need to intervene.** Stuart and Bob noted the handling of this project's monitoring might set a precedent and affect all restoration into the future. Paul felt bringing this plan to a monitoring plan review team could make it into the most efficient and cost-effective monitoring plan possible. Stuart noted the potential for creating a tiered monitoring plan, done as more money is acquired.

7. Integrated Regional Wetlands Monitoring Update

Stuart noted good progress on the IRWM project and that high-quality data is being collected at all sites. He noted pairs of nesting clapper rails have been identified at Carl's Marsh, which is one of the IRWM restored sites under evaluation. The team will be holding a workshop on June 8 and 9 to discuss progress.

8. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting date was set for Tuesday, July 13, at 1:30 P.M. The meeting was adjourned.