San Francisco Bay Area Wetlands Restoration Program
Wetlands Monitoring Group

Meeting Summary
September 8, 2003

Attendees:
Bob Batha (San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission)
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)
Heather Gustafson (Bay Planning Coalition)
Paul Jones (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)
Phil Lebednik (LFR Levine-Fricke)
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)
Steven Osborn (City of San Jose)
Chris Potter (California Resources Agency)
Stuart Siegel (Wetlands and Water Resources)
Eric Tattersall (California Department of Fish and Game)
Luisa Valiela (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)

1. Introductions/Review Agenda

Molly Martindale chaired the meeting and opened with a round of introductions. Molly asked for announcements. John Brosnan stated one item from the previous meeting was the compilation of a memo summarizing the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) and FACA's ramifications for Wetlands Restoration Program (WRP) groups. John said he and Mike Monroe coordinated with Tom Hagler - an attorney at EPA - and have created such a memo to be distributed to the group with the meeting summary. John also thanked group members for providing comments on the Coordinator's Workplan and said the revised draft would be circulated within the coming weeks. John said one suggestion that came from the workplan's initial circulation was for the WRP to hold a half-day workshop covering the Wetlands Tracker database. Such a workshop would provide an overview of what it is, how to use it and what the database information can be used for. John added the workshop would be held at the State Building in Oakland. Group members asked about the Joint Venture project tracking system being established and John said the Coordinating Committee would be discussing this issue at their September 26 meeting. Paul Jones said he'd circulated a draft agenda for the tidal datums reckoning workshop discussed at the last Monitoring Group meeting and wanted the whole group to know progress was being made towards that goal. Molly noted the State of the Estuary conference in taking place October 21, 22 and 23. Marcia Brockbank said she's attended the Indicators Workshop, headed up by Bruce Thompson, the week prior and that the summary was to come in the next few weeks.

2. Wetland Project Information Transmittal Form

Mike May presented the draft of a form he, Molly and Andree Breaux had been working on. The completed form would complement the permit application process and contain information to update the Wetland Tracker. The completed form would contain basic project information and definitions. At present, the draft form is one sheet, front and back, and a range of maps can be provided with it. Still to be decided is who completes the form and the where the funds to do that and input the data would come from. Molly questioned whether the form could be filled out online. Marcia suggested the form require latitude and longitude coordinates, as EPA requires the national estuary programs to supply such information. Molly said she envisioned this information obtained via this form as the information base participants are seeking to develop for what's going on around the bay. Mike noted the information obtained with this form is more detailed than the information in the present tracker database. Paul suggested applying for an EPA grant to get this off of the ground as a pilot project; this was the pilot could prove its initial credibility and be more likely to attract additional funding. The pilot would give an idea of the necessary workload and funding needs. He pointed out the compilation of this information could be used in assessing 404(b)1 cumulative impacts. He also suggested agency managers could have the responsibility for QA/QC; Paul looked forward to the Executive Council and the Coordinating Committee identifying funding options for this.

Molly noted the form needed a mechanism for updates and subsequent information to be added to projects. Paul suggested an in-lieu fee could perhaps fund such a mechanism. Phil Lebednik suggested each project have a unique number assigned to it and establishing a way to obtain all information and documents connected with each project. Mike May noted the Wetland Tracker contains links to pdf files. Bob Batha felt the primary use of this form was to keep accurate track of restoration and mitigation. Stuart Siegel advised having as few people as possible completed the form in order to maintain the best consistency and assured quality. Nadav Nur suggested expanding some categories, as some were more detailed than others. Phil noted that if the sheet were presented in Excel, it could easily translate into an Access database and thereby save a lot of data entry time. Eric Tattersall and Molly felt adding coordination with CDFG's streambed alternation agreement permitting would allow the information tracked to move up the watershed from just the baylands.

3. Update on July 14 Coordinating Committee subcommittee meeting

Molly said the group met to discuss how the Coordinating Committee could assist the Monitoring Group as it seeks to develop a regional monitoring program. Questions sought to be answered included how to track projects and how to manage and fund that process? The suggestion was made to focus on drafting the protocols in a more "street-friendly" form and John and Molly are working on this exercise right now. Josh Collins noted adjustments need to be made to the protocols and updating them is a task under current/upcoming Section 104 grants.

4. Wetlands Rapid Assessment Process (WRAP)

Andree Breaux said the initial report on the WRAP process is now available on Region 2 of the Water Board's website (http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/rwqcb2/download/wecareport0803.pdf).

The WRAP process assessed sites for permit compliance and assigned scores to each. Andree said the intention was to have a framework with lessons learned that could be compared to CRAM (the California Rapid Assessment Method) currently being developed. Andree added the intention is to co-test WRAP with CRAM and compare scores. The assessments looked at vegetation, wildlife, surrounding land uses, and hydrology. Testing covered several kinds of sites - such as tidal wetlands, riparian areas, and vernal pools - and tidal sites and larger sites tended to score higher in terms of compliance. Vernal pools proved relatively harder to score and assess. Molly said she hoped that, eventually, this process would be used to measure the mitigation site to the impacted site. Andree added her desire to see the process turn into an annual event at sites. Phil suggested, in evaluating success, spending significantly more time assessing larger sites would be worthwhile versus much less time spent at more, smaller sites.

5. Integrated Regional Wetlands Monitoring/CALFED

Stuart Siegel provided a brief overview of progress on the Integrated Regional Wetlands Monitoring (IRWM) project. This CALFED-funded effort will assess the condition of sites in San Pablo Bay, Suisun marsh, and the Delta; partners include U.C. Berkeley, PRBO Conservation Science, U.S.G.S., Philip Williams and Associates, SFEI, the University of Washington, and San Francisco State University. There are six teams together for now, using a conceptual monitoring model with integrated field data. Stuart said that the contracts with the California Bay-Delta Authority for the IRWM pilot program are now in place. Bird monitoring and aerial photography of the sites are beginning this month. A website has been established at www.irwm.org and will be grown steadily over the coming months.

6. CRAM and EMAP updates

Josh Collins gave an update on the California Rapid Assessment Method for wetlands (CRAM), which is based on assessment of physical site conditions and site vegetation. CRAM is founded on a U.S. EPA three-level approach; Level One is the GIS inventory, Level Two is the rapid assessment method, and Level Three is the intensive site-specific science needed to substantiate Levels One and Two. The state core team and regional science teams are established. The verification process has begun in southern California and will begin October 2 and 3 for the North Coast Regional Team. Currently, teams are preparing for the calibration process (i.e., the method of applying scores to sites) and scores are being calibrated along stressor gradients. Testing of calibration will precede implementation.

Josh also covered the Environmental Monitoring and Assessment Program (EMAP) project, which is an U.S. EPA research program to develop the tools necessary to monitor and assess the status and trends of national wetland resources. Information collected in the past year includes 1-meter scale data and intertidal drainage scale data. Recent accomplishments include agreement on what is the watershed for the bay, which concludes at the head of the tides. This has allowed for census data as well as ABAG 1990 land cover type data to be overlaid atop watershed boundaries. Habitat fragmentation analysis is ongoing and EMAP participants have come up with rules for what a "patch" would be. In the process of patch size frequency analysis, EMAP has generated new tools for assessing habitat condition. A poster displaying this work and accomplishments will be presented at the State of the Estuary conference in October.

7. Legacy Project's statewide wetlands inventory

Chris Potter stated that, 18 months ago, the statewide wetlands inventory conducted two workshops with the intention of determining the best means of creating a statewide wetlands inventory. Those workshops resulted in the determination to use the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) as the model. A third workshop is being held to check back with original workshop participants on September 23. The project currently has funding and one goal of the workshop will be to collect input on how best to spend the money. The workshop will also include a discussion of CRAM. Chris added a complete statewide inventory is expected to be complete by mid-2005. Paul noted the statewide inventory will include hydrogeomorphic (HGM) modifiers as an additional classification to that of the NWI, which will allow improved cross-referencing. Josh noted this will serve as a base map for moving upland from tidal baylands. Paul noted that completing the inventory with the use of a rotating basin analysis is a relatively more effective and efficient means of collecting data.

8. Bay Institute Ecological Scorecard

John presented some questions to the group on behalf of Anitra Pawley. He noted Anitra's work on building the Ecological Scorecard and stated project participants are working on a habitat extent indicator. The project team was recently asked to include salt ponds and diked baylands as two independent indicators due to their value to shorebirds and waterfowl. Anitra was interested in hearing from the group what they felt about using these manmade habitat types as indicators of bay health and, within them, what would represent a healthy condition. Nadav recognized that salt ponds have generally not been taken into account as valuable habitat types with the exception of the Goals Report, which provided a general quantity that should be retained. Paul suggested the Scorecard could list those targets found in the Goals Report and report on whether or not those goals were being met. He acknowledged these types' designation as discrete habitat categories.

9. Next Meeting Date

The next meeting date was set for Monday, October 27, at 1 P.M. The meeting was adjourned.