



Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program Steering Committee Meeting Notes

June 27th, 2024, 10:00 am - noon

Meeting Attachments

- 3/28/24 Steering Committee Meeting Minutes: [SC Meeting Notes_3_28_24.docx](#)
- TAC Meeting Notes (6/4): [TAC Meeting NOTES 06_04_2024.docx](#)
- WRMP Implementation Work Plan 2024-2025, with Appendix 1 on proposed EPA workplan and budget:
https://bayareametro.sharepoint.com/:w:/s/wrmp/EZPL_z11UctHtkwv01xC5SsBSFSljePyPbkQpkiGsqLyyQ?e=XBB0gF
- Memo on WRMP Subaward/Subcontracting Process:
https://bayareametro.sharepoint.com/:w:/s/wrmp/EcOOAf4Kl5pKjr8_Sp9ltsUBm72eRiFfWq_OAibCN4jCtQ?e=L0Eyob
- Redlined version of proposed WRMP Charter Revisions:
https://bayareametro.sharepoint.com/:w:/s/wrmp/ETRArldgOLdHgBbJzplugQGwBaLczvT0dObZXfqVdq_mfAw?e=85BuAF

Attendees – SC Members: Jonathan Cordero (Association of Ramaytush Ohlone), Jessie Olson (Save The Bay), Erin Chappell (CDFW), Kelli McCune (SF Bay Joint Venture), Stuart Siegel (SF NERR), Eyan Borgnis Sloane (Coastal Conservancy), Dylan Chapple (DSC), Erica Johnson (Restoration Authority), Dave Halsing (South Bay Salt Ponds), Xavier Fernandez (SF Water Board), Brenda Goeden (BCDC), Jana Affonso (USFWS), Renee Spent (Ducks Unlimited), Brian Meux (NOAA-NMFS), Ali Weber-Stover (NOAA-NMFS)

Attendees – Staff: Alex Thomsen (SFEP), Sasha Harris-Lovett (SFEP), Donna Ball (SFEI), Karen Verpeet (SFEI), Melissa Foley (SFEI), Hannah Kempf (SFEP), Christina Toms (Water Board)

Attendees - Others: Steve Culberson (IEP), Jaime Lopez (BCDC), Levi Lewis (UC Davis), Laura Feinstein (SFEI), Dana Michels (EPA)

Notes

1) Approval of 3/28/24 Steering Committee Meeting Minutes

- SC approves minutes

2) Implementation Work Plan 2024-25

Donna Ball, SFEI and TAC Co-Chair, Christina Toms, Water Board and TAC Chair, and Alex Thomsen, SFEP

Provide overview of Implementation Work Plan and budget, which describes monitoring to be conducted with current WRMP funds in 2024-25, for SC approval. *Desired Outcome: SC votes to approve implementation work plan.*

- Donna Ball (SFEI/SBSPRA) covered SFBRA-funded the work by WRMP team, including the Monitoring Plan, SOPs, early monitoring, updated website, aligned WRMP/SFBRA indicators, BHM data analysis and communication products, and program administration.
- Projects focused on lower costs/higher return on investment and building partnerships where WRMP can leverage funds efficiently.
- Baylands Habitat Map (BHM), CRAM, SETs, data management, and the People and Wetlands map are priorities for WRMP early monitoring.
- BHM 2024 analyses are described in detail in the Implementation Workplan. Some deliverables include: information products on marsh extent, marsh typologies, inundation, channel length and density.
- 2020 BHM uses object analysis and updated software to improve bay lands map from 2009. Planning to do a new BHM every 5 years, which will allow us to evaluate how and where marshes are developing and changing over time. Now that the map has been made once, doing it again will be quicker
- Goal is to integrate BHM with existing frameworks, Baylands Resilience Metrics (Water Board and USACE). This will allow WRMP to tease out which marshes are below mean high water. Also hoping to integrate/collaborate with FFH workgroup to understand how aquatic organisms/fish are supported by habitats.
- New CRAM planned at 18-21 sites this summer/fall. Currently, 39 sites in WRMP network have CRAM. Hoping to do new CRAM each year to track wetland condition.
- Sediment Elevation Tables (SETs), USGS (Thorne Lab) is current monitor. 2023/24 data collection, analysis and report underway. Installation at new site in 2023 at Raccoon Island, and incorporating Pond R4 at South Bay Salt Ponds into 2024 data collection. Several other sites in the Bay that WRMP team wants to incorporate into the network.
- Alex Thomsen (SFEP) covered People and Wetlands monitoring that will occur over the next year with already secured funding and in-kind support.
- A P&W appendix for Monitoring Plan will be added and feedback wanted.
- Projects Benefits Map will be reported in EcoAtlas. SFEI and SFEP staff are developing this with Wetland Program Development Grant. Shows benefits of wetland projects in relation to EJ communities. Working on figuring out how to leverage existing projects connected to EcoAtlas.
- P&W group is also working on a representation survey to understand decision-maker demographics and community and Tribal engagement. Supported by in-kind support from NOAA. WRMP hoping to distribute this survey this summer or fall and analyze data in late 2024 or early 2025.

- Questions and comments:
 - Branda Goeden requested more BCDC participation in P&W survey development, particularly with public access.
 - Laura Feinstein wants to know who the decision-makers are for the survey.
 - Jana Affonso wanted information on map processing/data analysis. Christina T. pointed staff towards soon-to-be updated geospatial SOP, and Alex Braud.
 - Regulatory compliance question from Jana Affonso. Recommends regulatory compliance section be added to plan. Christina Toms mentioned all permits for CRAM and other field projects will be secured. Talking to landowners actively.
 - Levi Lewis mentioned longfin smelt will be listed next month. Levi working on securing permits now to continue FFH sampling.

- *Vote for Implementation Workplan - approved by SC*

3) EPA Proposed Work Plan and Budget

Karen Verpeet, SFEI, Sasha Harris-Lovett, SFEP

Provide overview of the process for developing the workplan for the EPA San Francisco Bay Program Office, as well as the monitoring components, and equity and engagement components. Provide overview of the SFEP and SFEI budgets for this work. Provide information about funding for fish monitoring.

Desired Outcome: SC opportunity for questions and feedback.

- \$17 million total is available from the EPA Program Office.
- \$5 million now, and will request the addition \$7 after initial funds are spent.
- SFEP round 1 workplan is for 3.5 years, while SFEI is for 2 years.
- Receiving BHM and CRAM funds from SFBRA, supplying match and supporting needed early monitoring.
- EPA workplans/budgets from SFEP and SFEI were broken into overlapping tasks.
 - Task 1: Implementation Workplan updates, and monitoring site coordination
 - Task 2: Data collection, synthesis, analysis, visualization, reporting, dissemination, data management, FFH monitoring (EPA priority; Xavier Fernandez mentioned this also priority for Water Board).
 - Priority from EPA Program Office is equity. Funding will support data collection and analysis of wetland visitation, flood risk reduction, sense of belonging, demographics of wetland decision-making, and spatial distribution of wetland benefits to communities.
 - Task 3: Indicator alignment and metrics, regional indicator alignment for wetland science and human dimensions
 - Task 4: WRMP governance, management and administration. Will also be updating Management Questions with contractor.
 - Task 5: Equitable engagement with CBOs, Estuary Youth Council and Tribes, regulatory and project implementer engagement.

- Xavier Fernandez asked if WRMP will we have enough data to update Management and Monitoring Questions in 2027? Sasha Harris-Lovett answered: Potentially. Can change the date if needed.
- Brenda Goeden commented that if funding SFEI, she is concerned that they're leaving out other wetland restoration/monitoring consultants in the Bay area. Karen Verpeet answered that from SFEI's perspective, they're not consultants. SFEI is not interested/able to do all the monitoring themselves. Will be coordinating with consultants throughout the region. Donna Ball added that in this early WRMP stage, some expediency is needed to get the program off the ground. Christina Toms noted that costs vary a lot between consultants vs. USGS/others and that many consultants are on WRMP technical workgroups. Xavier Fernandez mentioned consultants will be doing site-specific monitoring; there is going to be more monitoring to do than can get done with the whole workforce of monitors.

4) Fish Monitoring

Levi Lewis, UC Davis

Describe fish monitoring to be conducted with EPA SF Bay Program Office funds.

Desired Outcomes: SC opportunities for questions and feedback.

- Levi Lewis gave an overview of his WRMP SOW and Implementation Plan for the Monitoring of FFH.
- Lewis mentioned that this will be a trial and error process in the first year, as they have not visited some of these sites and not used all the gear listed in this plan.
- Team is still working on permitting for coho salmon, green sturgeon, and longfin smelt.
- Tradeoffs for FFH work exist. These are primarily concerning 1) spatial dispersion (how many OLU's can be surveyed)? 2) What is the density of sampling? and 3) What is the frequency of visiting the sites? Lewis seeking feedback on these tradeoffs from SC, and then will solicit feedback from FFH workgroup.
- Objectives for first year included: 1) design survey using statistical analyses of existing data from Bay Study and other studies 2) validation of gear/deployment methods. Settled on otter trawl (Suisun Marsh Fish Study and Bay Study) because it gives a lot of flexibility and is widely used. Beach seine also added for shallow species and set nets for larger fish not sampled with other methods. Ideally, they want data to be complementary, 3) collect baseline data, especially at priority sites. Focusing mostly on otter trawl as it is the most versatile. Their goal is to expand sampling throughout priority sites – which are listed in Levi's document. 4) Feasibility is top of mind. 5) Data integration – Levi wants to develop R scripts, etc so that this data can be used in tandem with SF Bay Study and others. 6) Dissemination: goal is to share this work with people at conferences like SOE and produce a manuscript.
- Levi noted that results from early monitoring may confirm that FFH guidelines are good OR not so good.
- Data also includes water quality, as well as fish ecological metrics (abundances, diversity, non-native vs. native)

- Early goal is to evaluate FFH SOP and then make recommendations based on the initial data.
- Field sampling design and loose budget also in the document.
- Questions/comments:
 - Stuart Siegel in chat: Fish questions: 1) "trial and error" a decades-old concept and one oft used to attack restoration science. CALFED always required conceptual models to guide science research. 2) Spatial dispersion, sampling density and sampling frequency? what are the management questions being answered with these data? What are the conceptual models of how fish presence, abundance, etc. in relation to the management questions? 3) what sampling actually takes places in marshes? Otter trawl and beach seine not in-marsh methods, not sure about set nets. 4) how are results analyzed in relation to the many other WRMP metrics being monitored? Marsh elevation, stage of restoration evolution? Marsh vegetation cover, density, community types?
 - Levi Lewis: Suisun Marsh otter trawl has been happening for a long time. Need to be mindful of these concerns.
 - Stuart is most concerned about how to sample in the marshes, not just near the marshes (like otter trawl).
 - Laura Feinstein in chat: I'm fine receiving a response on this question in chat or later via email. Levi, are you developing your sampling methods so they will align with the data being collections for California estuaries though the Estuarine Marine Protected Area monitoring program? They have standard SOPs and are collecting data for numerous estuaries - not just MPAs and aligning protocols would allow comparison of SF Estuary with other estuaries. <https://empa.sccwrp.org/>
 - Erin Chappell: white sturgeon also going to get listed CA ESA , more permits
 - Steven Culberson, IEP representative, commented that there is no perfect answer to any of this. Doesn't believe that going through this process and having to adjust process is inherently bad. Program goals is what needs to be top of mind. With limited resources, what is Program's objective? (+1 Melissa Foley)
 - Levi commented that establishing baseline regionally is a top goal. Special studies in FFH document may also be useful for folks to check out.
 - Levi will share a scope of work with the SC for review.

5) Staffing the WRMP: Subawards / Subcontracts and in-house expertise

Melissa Foley, SFEI

Discuss the WRMP processes for determining subawards / subcontracts.

Desired Outcomes: SC initial feedback.

- Jessie Olson mentioned that there is an opportunity to have focus group outside of this presentation.

- Subcontracting process for WRMP covered by Melissa Foley.
- As we move into implementation, important to be clear on this.
- Current process has not been brought to SC until now. In large part, this is due to expediency. Current sub-contracts are appropriate for the monitoring WRMP is trying to do now. Current criteria is that contractors 1) have expertise in the method in the SFE, 2) they have the capacity to do the work now and 3) they have knowledge of the WRMP, as a TAC member or other. For example, USGS doing SET work.
- There are two EPA-specific requirements will have to be added to this list: 1) With federal funding, data must be publicly available, and 2) contracting ease. There are four different levels of contracting with the EPA including: 1. subawards, 2) micropurchases (<50k) for small contracts, 3) small contracts (50-250k) 4) large contracts (>250k).
- Possible future process for WRMP can be informed by Bay RMP. They have a multi-year plan that is presented to their equivalent of a TAC/SC. This plan identifies workgroup projects and entities that can do that work to answer management questions. Once identified, a proposal and scope of work is developed. All that goes through their TAC-equivalent for review, and the SC approves. In most cases, there are not multiple entities capable of doing the work as defined by the program.
- WRMP is not at the Bay RMP status for regional monitoring yet.
- Summary of possible future criteria for subcontracting includes: maintain the first three criteria, plus add in criteria for cost effectiveness/EPA contracting needs, and public data/tools.
- Questions/Comments:
 - Renee Spenst: Just curious - why is WRMP knowledge and participation a critical criteria? Response from Christina Toms: At this early stage of implementation, we don't have the capacity to bring entities up to speed on the WRMP if they don't know anything about it. Response from Dave Halsing: Not a big deal, but: Depending on the nature of the work to be done, it may be the case that it's not super-important for those entities to know much about the WRMP
 - Brenda Goeden suggests that current/prior involvement in WRMP language change to be about "fit" with the program and the purposes of the program, not prior experience (+1 Renee Spenst). Brenda's experiences on sediment workgroup with Bay RMP is that the people in meetings/in working groups get the work. Wants to expand. Melissa: wants people to share information regarding other folks that may be able to do the work.
 - Renee in chat: I agree with Brenda's suggestion. It doesn't seem like this should be a required criteria so much as a preference.
 - Dave Halsing in chat: Exactly.
 - Kelli McCune in chat: Agreed, and if I understood Melissa correctly, it sounds like the criteria is more about applied science to answer management questions, not research science for academic purposes.

- Xavier Fernandez added that choosing contractors needs to assess knowledge and understanding of the WRMP. What that comes down to is not just reading docs online. Based more on experience with program.

6) Limited Updates to the WRMP Charter

Alex Thomsen, SFEP

Describe proposed limited updates to the WRMP Charter.

Desired outcomes: SC votes to approve limited updates to the Charter.

- Revision this year to meet Charter guidelines from 2022
- Revisions include: add in the mission statement for the WRMP, list coordinating entities on the WRMP (greater visibility) rather than in the Charter, remove “stakeholders” and replacing with “interested group”, and have the next Charter revision in 2027.
- *Approved by SC* (Dana Michels from EPA abstained, “not an official alternate”)

7) Announcements

- September 26th is SC meeting
- July 16th is next TAC meeting
- Lead Scientist hiring process. SFEI should have this sorted out next week.
- Ron Duke passed away.

8) Adjourn