

Meeting of the Wetland Monitoring Group of the San Francisco Bay Wetland Restoration Program.

Summary of Wetland Monitoring Group (WMG) Meeting held on July 12, 2005 at the Water Board Office, 1515, Clay ST., Room 12, Oakland, CA 94612 from 1:30 to 4:30. Summary written by Andree Breaux.

Attendees: Bob Batha (BCDC); Andree Breaux (Water Board & Chair of WMG); Marcia Brockbank (SFEP); John Brosnan (Sonoma Land Trust) John Callaway (USF); Josh Collins (SFEI); Nadine Hitchcock (CA Coastal Conservancy); Michael May (SFEI); Peggy Olofson (Invasive Spartina Project); Chris Potter (Resources Agency); Stuart Siegel (Wetland & Water Resources); Luisa Valiela (U.S. EPA).

Agenda Item #1: Sonoma Baylands Draft Letter of the Monitoring Review Team (MRT) based on comments made at the Workshop held on May 2, 2005 (A. Breaux & J. Brosnan).

The final draft letter from the workshop was distributed just before the meeting so comments from the WMG or MRT are due to John Brosnan as soon as possible. The final letter will be posted on the website at www.sfwetlands.ca.gov, and Peter Baye's comments as an independent consultant about the project will be put in a separate document. We will invite Phillip Williams & Associates (PWA) to write up a one-page response to the final letter about the project or the process.

Regarding the usefulness of the MRT's review of the Sonoma Baylands project, there were several comments and suggestions made, some of which are included here. Overall the MRT review of the project was helpful to the regulatory agencies that attended the workshop on May 2, 2005 which began with a presentation by the PWA team on the Sonoma Baylands project, and was followed by a MRT panel discussion of the overall direction of the project. Agency representatives found the MRT's participation in the workshop useful because of the discussion about some site specific issues that need further discussion (e.g., peninsula height and design, a sill preventing channel erosion, surveys of mammals – both endangered species and predators, etc.); because it validated much of the PWA approach to carrying out the monitoring with a limited budget; and because it provided overall information on wetland restoration processes in general, especially for future restoration projects (e.g., the effective use of reference sites, the need for more conceptual models and adaptive management approaches that can use experimental approaches to test hypotheses about restoration sites). (For the complete discussion, see the final letter on the web page which should be posted by August 15, 2005.)

Meeting participants suggested that these types of workshops with MRT participation should be held before the ninth year after the restoration starts, as was the case with the Sonoma Baylands workshop, and should ideally be held before the monitoring plans are approved by the agencies. The experience gained from restoration projects over the past decade could assist in designing the most cost effective, scientific strategies for restoration. The Sonoma Baylands monitoring effort may have received more funding than most restoration projects funded today, so it is important to begin to

emphasize coordinated, cost-effective, region-wide efforts to design and fund these monitoring projects. Emphasis in the state and region still appears to be on acquiring and designing restoration projects, but not on following-through with funding for well-designed, affordable monitoring programs. The Coastal Conservancy (CC) is working on removing some of the blocks on bond money that prohibit funds for monitoring, and on trying to get other entities to contribute or raise money for monitoring efforts.

It was also suggested that agencies incorporate into their permits requirements or suggestions for MRTs to review the project monitoring plans early on, and to make suggestions for standardized monitoring to ensure consistency and the use of protocols developed for this region that protect the environment and track project success at a minimal cost. Requirements should also be made for presentations or workshops every year, other year, or fifth year, so that agencies and the public can see the data and analyses and, if funding is available, MRT members can be selected from the private and nonprofit sector. If these aspects are eventually incorporated into agency permits, a pilot program was suggested to coordinate the results from MRT reviews with the Design Review Group, the Coordinating Committee of the Wetland Restoration Program.

As for the usefulness of the MRT review to the development of the Sonoma Baylands Project itself, that will depend on whether the comments of the group influenced the content or the emphasis of the U.S Army Corp's Scope of Work for next year's project which is currently being written. The CC which is a permit holder for the project, will review the draft letter and provide comments. For future projects, Nadine Hitchcock suggested that the CC would prefer consensus from the MRT but it was noted that that would probably add another step to the process which the WMG could not afford at this time.

Appreciation was [or should have been] expressed to John Brosnan and the PWA Team (Phillip Williams, Phylis Faber, & Jeremy Lowe) for their help in setting up and following up the workshop.

Marcia Brockbank reported that the WMG should have funding (\$10,000) for MRT review of another project this year. The Hamilton Restoration Project was suggested as a potential monitoring plan for review. [Note, that since the 7/12/05 meeting Eric Joliffe of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers stated that that agency may want to organize its own monitoring group to review the Hamilton Project.] The next meeting will be Tuesday, December 6, 2005 from 1:30 to 4:30. More projects could be covered if an attempt was made to summarize and get agreement at the meeting itself, thus avoiding the time required to draft the long and extensive letter about the project after the meeting.

Agenda Item #2: Invasive Spartina Project (ISP) (P. Olofson).

Peggy provided extensive information on the ISP's campaign to eradicate invasive cordgrass in the S.F. Region. Handouts included a figure with the 15+ sites that were treated for the invasive cordgrass in 2004 and on the 23+ sites that will be treated in 2005-2006, and a Summary of Survey Data collected on percent cover of native & non-native cordgrass and the potential presence of the endangered CA Clapper Rail. Chemical treatments will include "Habitat" (=Imaziphur?) as well as "Rodeo"

(=Glyphosate). Treatments include herbicides, physical removal, and flooding. The Coastal Conservancy and UC Davis have and will be spending large sums to eradicate the

invasive cordgrass from the San Francisco Bay, so they are seeking assistance from regulatory and nonprofit agencies, as well as the public to support their 3-4 year intensive effort.

Agenda Item #3: SFEI's Regional Wetland Tracker (WT) (J.Collins/M.May).

Josh & Mike described work being done at the regional and state level with the Wetland Tracker. SFEI has received additional EPA funding to expand the WT into the Watersheds, and Napa will probably be used as the pilot watershed. Previous work has already been done to collect data on about 120 baylands projects for the WT. The WT will eventually show losses and gains in the SF Region. Andree would like to pass the data input form around to Water Board management as soon as it is finalized so Michael will work on that and convene a subcommittee meeting in the near future to address outstanding issues with wetland project tracking. SFEI is working with the Joint Venture Wetland Tracker staff to coordinate the two databases.

12 quads in the South Bay have been added to the National Wetland Inventory maps.

The California Rapid Assessment Method (CRAM) scores will be compared to those from the Wetland Ecological Assessment (WEA) method by SFEI personnel and by John Callaway under the State Board study. CRAM is being calibrated at 150 estuarine and riparian sites across the State.

The Wetland Regional Monitoring Protocols are beginning to get some use in the SF Bay region, and a new protocol for methyl-mercury is being developed and will eventually be posted with the other protocols on SFEI's website.

Agenda Item #4: EPA funding for Tracking the State's Compliance with the No Net Loss Policy (C. Potter).

Chris reported that this grant will be funded under EPA's Wetland Demonstration Pilot Program to track wetland losses and gains in the State. The work plan includes developing statewide guidance for tracking wetland losses and gains, producing a map based on the National Wetland Inventory, expanding the tracking system in most if not all Water Board regions; populating the database; assessing the quality of non-regulatory wetlands; and demonstrating the resulting tools across the state. Funding will be \$300,000 each year for three years.

Chris will be working with Water Board representatives across the state as well as with SFEI, the Southern CA Recovery Project, Coastal Conservancy, any many other groups dealing with tracking the quantity and quality of wetlands in CA.

Updates:

1. Stuart Siegel discussed the need to develop better quality control in the use of tidal datums noting that there have been two recent problems regionally relating tidal datums to geodetic datums and site elevations with sometimes serious consequences. This problem has been around for some time, but has not been resolved, and is very important for tidal marsh restoration. No land or marsh elevations should be referenced to NGVD 29 since the datum is antiquated and not supported by any agencies. Land and marsh

elevations should be referenced to NAVD 88, and marsh elevations should also be referenced to local tidal datums. Josh is working with NOAA on an analysis of how the length of tidal records and the timing of the records effects datum estimates for tidal marshes.

2. Updates on North & South Bay Salt Pond Restoration, Napa Salt Plant, and Sears Point were not covered since we ran out of time.

3. Anitra Pawley of the Bay Institute is asking for help with updating her wetland restoration project list in the SF Bay area. Andree will forward her email to the group so please help her out if you have knowledge of new or existing projects.

Action Items:

- John Brosnan will finalize the draft Letter of Review for the Sonoma Baylands project consisting of comments by the Monitoring Review Team and post it on the website. Andree will invite a one-page letter from the PWA Team responding to the final MRT letter about the Sonoma Baylands project.
- Andree will ask Water Board management of the possibility of adding regular presentations or workshops to WDR provisions for large wetland restoration projects (which is done already in many cases) and of having a team of wetland experts review the monitoring plan before the permit is issued with the expectation that the team's recommendations would at least be addressed in writing by the project applicant. This team would be composed of agency staff or paid consultants or academics if funds are available.
- Michael will compile a list of the final issues that need to be resolved for the Wetland Tracker, at which point the Wetland Tracker Subcommittee will be reconvened. He will also make the most recent but minor changes to the WT form and determine the compatibility of the form with the San Francisco Bay Water Board's website, after which Andree will distribute it to Water Board management for approval.
- Josh & Stuart will begin a protocol for quality control of tidal datums for later distribution to key authorities on the subject.

Next Meeting: **Tuesday, December 6, 2005 from 1:30 to 4:30** at Water Board Office, 1515 Clay Street, Oakland, CA 94612. For spots on the agenda, please notify Andree at Abreaux@waterboards.ca.gov. or 510-622-2324.