Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program
Steering Committee Meeting
September 1, 2020 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Remote via Zoom

Attendees: Heidi Nutters (SFEP), Kelly Santos (SFEP), Aimee Good (SF Bay NERR), Christina Toms (Water Board), Dave Halsing (SBSPRP), Sahrye Cohen (USACE), Sarah Firestone (USACE), Brenda Goeden (BCDC), Brian Meaux (NOAA Fisheries), Tony Hale (SFEI ASC), Cristina Grosso (SFEI ASC), Julian Wood (Point Blue), Kaylee Allen (USFWS), Lisa Vaas (EPA), Melissa Foley (SFEI), Mike Chotkowski (USGS), Moira Mcenespy (SCC), Renee Spenst (DU), Sandra Scoggin (SFBJV), Xavier Fernandez (Water Board), Maggie Jenkins (SCC and Restoration Authority), Joseph Huston (Alameda County Mosquito Abatement), Jessie Olson (Save the Bay), Shalini Kannan (SBSPRP), Jessica Davenport (SCC)

Actions:

- SC to review the WRMP Funding Strategy **by October 9, 2020- feel free to provide edits/comments via suggesting mode or via email.**
- Bay RMP multi year planning meeting on 10/21 would be good opportunity for synergy
- Next SC meeting- discuss developed proposal of optional monitoring fee and proposal to Restoration Authority, update on data management

1) Welcome, Introductions

Heidi Nutters, WRMP Project Manager

- Meeting presentations and materials in this folder
- Remaining meetings for 2020: October 27th and December 15th
- BRRIT Workshop
    - Planning a workshop that explores the role of regional monitoring in project-specific permit requirements
- Roster of SC Members can be found at this link

2) WRMP Funding Strategy

Heidi Nutters, WRMP Project Manager

Informational presentation and overview of the WRMP Funding Strategy

Desired outcome: Inform Steering Committee

- There is a need for sustainable funding
- Poll everywhere results

    - Images in slides showed WRMP products and key messages that were generated in previous SC meeting
- WRMP Program Areas
    - Program management, data management, science implementation, and communications
- Science funding at the outset of the program. Add additional funding for indicators in year 2, addition of one TAC work group
- Cost assumptions- individual costs can be looked at as line items for staff or contracts. Based on costs at MTC but they may be different depending on the need. Program management will initially be more costly but will reduce over time and remain below 35% the overall budget following year 1.
- Brenda- question about communication. Feels like it is missing. Not seeing the communication of the data to the users. Could be the most important piece as we go forward. Should be communicated to the regulatory, restoration, and scientific community as soon as we have it. See that the communication is more summary rather than regular updates.
    - Some of that is in the science implementation and data visualization. Have discussed that communications are underfunded. Need to keep the funding and budget low enough so that the program is fundable. Can seek grants to help with the communications
- Funding sources
    - Optional monitoring fee in consultation with regulatory agencies
    - No formal agreements, these are preliminary ideas. Pilot approach. Some project proponents are interested in this approach
    - Reduce project level monitoring and establish benchmark sites
- Grants/Contracts
- Philanthropy
    - Supplemental funding can add capacity
- Consensus items for the SC
    - Prioritize funding approaches, seeking approval that SC agrees with the approach
    - Pilot test optional monitoring fee
    - SFBRA funding proposal?
- One area where there is project monitoring and WRMP- Aerial imagery to map vegetation communities. Optional monitoring fee could pay for imagery WRMP uses and interpreted at project level to track change in the quantity and location of wetlands.

- Jessica: Restoration Authority has discussed that optional monitoring fee could be incorporated into the proposal. Could include in budget funding to go to the WRMP and SFBRA together.
    - Optional monitoring fee could go towards the permitting after the funding has been distributed
    - Project at implementation phase with budget with monitoring and usually hire a consultant, in this case, they could have that funding go to the WRMP
- Renee - there could be a lag for several years depending on how this is crafted with the permitted depending on if there is a one time fee. It depends on when the funding is available to go into the program
- Renee - SCC guidance is closer to 20%, is there any thought to reduce program management costs?
    - Cristina Grosso scanned Bay RMP budgets from early years and our budget is very similar to the program management of the Bay RMP in the early years. The costs scale to the costs of the Bay RMP in 1994
- USFWS doesn't have any ability to collect fees with endangered species monitoring. Want the language to be made clear that this is an optional fee
- Brenda - funding sources - mentioned that there would be legislative funding with the Natural Resources Agency because they are very focused on good science. Worth some investigation
    - Definitely interested and if the SC could provide some support and guidance.
    - Can list this as a possible option in the strategy
- Are there calculations on how many projects would have to join in order to meet our need?
    - Project monitoring would be more costly than the optional monitoring fee. Would need to adjust budget based on the number of projects
    - Could there be outreach to current projects?
    - One challenge is to find a relevant reference site with many of the project sites. Helpful to look at a range of sites and then focus on the process of development rather than the end goal. Need to decide from a regulatory perspective if we are ok with mudflats vs salt marsh
    - Benchmark sites - one of the permit requirements is to have a reference site. Could see benchmarks being used as reference. Requires tidal channel, vegetation, sedimentation. These could be targeted for the initial work and support regulatory monitoring.
- Tony: If new funding options present themselves, beyond the categories you've already pre-identified, what would the process look like for considering the viability of

that opportunity? In other words, if a private foundation (or even a major individual donor) wanted to add capacity to the WRMP for science implementation, for example, would the proposal be conveyed to the SC for consideration? Does the Funding Plan constrain how or which of these opportunities might be reviewed? You mentioned that other categories would not be excluded, but how would such a proposal dovetail with the terms defined in the current Funding Plan?

- Host entity would need to be adaptable to new funding sources. Devised a process that is intentionally deliberative. Built in adaptability. Would need capacity to build

- Describing a "business plan" for the WRMP. And to lure in projects, we need to make a case that demonstrates a "value proposition" to the project proponents illustrating that it's worth it.
  - The two landowners in SBSP project would be very happy to have the SBSPRP raise funds and kick into the WRMP. It's impossible to fund all of the monitoring they need to do on our own, so a 'cheaper' model is very attractive.
  - Want to address the statements about the monitoring being less expensive and if they are actually hiring the work out
- Could project development, complementary program to water board program. One is extending into reference areas and restored area.
  - Bay RMP is not funded by developers but it is funded by dischargers. We need projects to be on the ground and meeting success goals with mitigation sites. This would be harder to contribute to the fee compared to restoration sites.
  - There is synergy with Bay RMP, doing studies that are relevant to the WRMP.
- Is there a way we can cast a bigger net to bring in more entities
  - Publicly owned treatment works due to nutrient discharge. They are already paying into Bay RMP. Will need to leverage this for WRMP and ask them to pay things that they are already interested in
- Are there opportunities to combine monitoring programs?
  - Sediment work group and Bay RMP being a model for this program. Natural nexus is work groups
  - Best thing to strive for synergy. Not likely for the Bay RMP to grow to absorb the WRMP. Bay RMP is focused on water quality, not wetlands. It is a 4 million dollar program that still does not fund all the monitoring it wants to
    - This is reflected in the WRMP Plan. Did consider this early in the planning process
- Wanting to come to SC and get consensus at the next SC meeting in October

- Brian - wanted to respond about expanding the net. Often asking for compensatory mitigation for shorelines through mag stev act, through recommendations to the Corps and included in permit. Eelgrass as example. To mitigate and monitor. Is there something similar for wetlands? There are a lot of riprap seawalls that are creating impacts that would need mitigation through projects or banks. Could include monitoring and that monitoring could be a fee to the WRMP
    - Need to even the playing field. Rip rap that doesn't have value actually requires less monitoring for oyster balls. Xavier talking about how to incorporate this
- Julian - creating SOPs, so that groups that want to do their own monitoring can. Get this into the permit language; SOPS can provide guidance to permitees so that they can collect data and share it on the WRMP platform.
    - Have a need to work gradually and cannot fund all the indicators initially. By year 3-5, the hope is that we would get to all the indicators.
    - Working with the TAC to focus on the highest priorities first which include management question 1 and then build on other indicators in the future.
- Melissa wants to echo the synergy with Bay RMP. Plan special studies a year in advance. Multi year planning meeting on October 21st would be good opportunity for synergy
- Add pieces that we want to make monitoring cheaper, and why we want min monitoring requirements, and how we make monitoring more cost effective.
- It seems pretty clear that there will need to be some up front funding by someone. Whether that is EPA, SFEP or RA to get this started. Figuring out how to cast that wider net creates more certainty over time, because there could be some big highs and lows in funding availability if it is all dependent on optional project payments. The WRMP potentially would need to bank much of that funding for future years -Figuring out that piece will be an important part of the business plan.
- Idea from Dave: Say there was a big public infrastructure project that had large regional benefits to society but also had large impacts (areas and volumes of fill, dredging, habitat loss, noise, etc.) Maybe something like the new Bay Bridge span or perhaps a runway expansion at an airport or a new BART tube or something. Could the regulatory agencies ever bundle the necessary mitigation for all of those impacts into a requirement to set up an endowment for the long-term funding of the WRMP? It's a big lift, obviously, and out-of-kind mitigation, but trying to think creatively…
    - Luisa: Dave, we have already mentioned this to new SFO project being shopped to the agencies, so yes, definitely something to keep in mind - though

timing may not make it functional for a while (projects will happen and we won't have a "structure" in place yet that can accept funding)

3) Technical Advisory Committee Update

Christina Toms, Water Board

Presentation on current science priorities for TAC and what we expect to cover in the near future

Desired outcome: Inform Steering Committee

- Three TAC meetings so far. A lot of members were engaged with phase 1 of the wrmp but not everyone
- Have conceptual science framework in the Plan and TAC is operationalizing and providing the scientific and technological advice to the WRMP SC, assure the credibility of WRMP content and finding, and make recommendations on workgroups and special studies. Eg. working with sediment workgroup and any special studies that focus
- Science Priorities
    - Guiding question 1 - getting everyone up to speed and identified priority indicators and supporting fit-gap analysis by identifying criteria for WRMP data and min data requirements, and opportunities for leveraging related mapping efforts such as Baylands Change basemap
    - Guiding Question 2: Benchmark sites and WRMP monitoring site network
        - Identifying criteria to prioritize establishing benchmark and reference sites, identifying priority indicators to monitor at sites (hydrology, geomorphology, and wildlife). What data do we need to begin to identify leading indicators of change? Provided input to USGS on potential sediment transport study site
    - Guiding Question 3: Largely tackling this with regards to vegetation
    - Overview of anticipated TAC work through 2020
    - Questions
        - Focusing on aerial imagery and the physical side of things. Should veg be a focus?
            - This is incorporated in indicator 7 of the master matrix to map/characterize major dominant wetland communities
            - Once there is more discussion with SOPs, there will be more conversation about level 3 monitoring.
            - Fit Gap analysis is helpful for assessing viability with vegetation map

4) Data Management Update

Cristina Grosso and Tony Hale, Aquatic Science Center

Presentation and update on the Fit-Gap Analysis, followed by brief discussion

Desired outcome: Inform Steering Committee

- Received valuable input from the TAC
- Also considering data use restrictions and leading/trailing indicators
- Fit-gap analysis criteria for indicators
    - Resolution, geographic extent, frequency of updates, documentation/data quality, comments/questions
- Next steps
    - Synthesize survey responses from TAC
    - Interpret and review responses with TAC Chair and Vice Chair to get a consensus view and determine minimum standards
    - Prepare draft fit-gap analysis report
    - Question: beaches looking at beaches in front of marshes and synergy between beaches and marshes