



Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program

Steering Committee Meeting Notes

September 26, 2024, 10:00 am - noon

Meeting Attachments

- [Birds Workgroup Description](#)
- Memo “[Proposed Addition of New Seat to the Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program Steering Committee](#)”
- People and Wetlands [Standard Operating Procedure for Representation in Wetland Decision-Making](#)
- People and Wetlands [additions to the Monitoring Plan](#)
- [6/27/24 Steering Committee Meeting Minutes](#)
- [TAC Meeting Notes \(9/6\)](#)

Attendees:

Steering Committee members: Erica Johnson (SCC), Dave Halsing (South Bay Salt Ponds), Jessie Olson (Save The Bay), Erika Castillo (ACMAD), Matt Ferner (NERR), Evyan Borgnis Sloane (SCC), Kelli McCune (SFBJV), Erin Chappell (CDFW), Tom Kimball (USGS), Dylan Chappell (DSC), Luisa Valiela (EPA), Jana Affonso (USFWS), Xavier Fernandez (SFBRWQCB), Matt Gaul (EBRPD), Renee Spenst (Ducks Unlimited)

WRMP staff: Alex Thomsen (SFEP), Sasha Harris-Lovett (SFEP), Aviva Rossi (SFEI), Donna Ball (SFEI), Lisa Beers (SFEI), Karen Verpeet (SFEI), Melissa Foley (SFEI), Christina Toms (SFBRWQCB)

Others: Laura Feinstein (SFEI), Steve Culberson (IEP), Ally Malilay (NOAA Fisheries)

Agenda

1) Approval of 6/27/24 Steering Committee Meeting Minutes – 1 min

- Approved (Matt Ferner abstained since he wasn't on the SC for the last meeting)

2) Program Updates

Karen Verpeet, SFEI

- Introduction of new WRMP Lead Scientists, Dr. Aviva Rossi and Dr. Lisa Beers
 - Reach out to both of them with questions or thoughts – they are sharing the Lead Scientist role.
 - Lisa will be leading vegetation and sediment topics, Aviva on wildlife and People and Wetlands.
- CRAM is underway
 - Surveys completed at 11 sites in the South Bay (19 assessments)
 - Will be doing 6 sites in the North Bay this week (10 assessments)
- WRMP session on Monday afternoon at the Bay-Delta Science Conference in Sacramento on Sept. 30th
- Update on status of funding
 - EPA funding expected mid-November
 - Applying for more RA funding, will present to the Governing Board in October and again in December.

3) Defining the charge of the Birds Workgroup

Aviva Rossi, SFEI

- The birds workgroup will coordinate with the SFBJV and Point Blue State of the Birds, and this is a WRMP Workgroup responsive to the interest of the SC and TAC.
- Draft charge has description of the first year, and the workgroup will refine the charge going forward. SC and TAC will have opportunities to provide feedback as the workgroup takes shape.
- Timeline: begin assembling the workgroup in October 2024.
- If you have suggestions of people to serve on the bird workgroup, please let Aviva Rossi know.

Discussion

- Jana Affonso: They have questions at USFWS how the regulatory process will work for these workgroups. USFWS wants to have a broader conversation about regulatory alignment and permitting.
 - WRMP will follow up with Jana to talk more.
- Tom Kimball: What is the relationship of bird workgroup with other groups? So much of what we learn about the birds and fish related to each other – is there a plan to get the bird and fish folks together?
 - Yes. WRMP can get the individual workgroups together. This first year is just starting to monitor, but there will be opportunities for cross-sharing of information and analyses, including on the TAC.
- Kelli McCune: WRMP wrote letters of support for State of the Birds, and USGS is a key partner too. Thanks for the partnership and coordination. https://sfbayjv.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/SFBJV_IS_r1_FINAL_reduced.pdf

- Donna Ball: We recognize that there is an interest in migratory birds that live in managed ponds, so we'll be sure to have that expertise on the workgroup. In the first year, we'll be focusing on tidal marsh birds.
- Dylan Chapple: Reached out to Donna and Aviva on ongoing work that's being funded by DWR in the Delta. They breached the 3400 acre Lookout Slough project last week – there's a lot of potential to look at bird use. There's a big need to benefit the documents of these restoration projects for non-fish species.
- Dave Halsing: Thrilled there will be bird monitoring. Fine that in the first year that it will focus on tidal marsh birds, but it will be helpful to expand to waterbirds in future years. There are a lot of managed ponds that are really important for birds. It's not just for the South Bay Salt Ponds Project, it's for all the different birds.
- Donna Ball: Her hope is that formation of the bird workgroup will start to think cohesively about birds in the Bay and how we can gather regional data.
- Matt Ferner (in chat): Bird tidbit: We now have a functioning Motus tower at Rush Ranch, overlooking Hill Slough. Hopefully the Motus (bird-tracking) network can be expanded regionally and integrated with future bird monitoring by WRMP and others.
- Evyan Borgnis Sloane (in chat): Don't want to take up space for this benign comment, but just want to make sure the workgroup includes reps from existing monitoring efforts. I heard Point Blue and USGS for State of the Birds, but also SFBBO, ISP, CDFW motus towers, etc,

Vote: approved

Introduction of new Steering Committee members:

Matt Ferner (NERR) – he has moved into the director role, and Stuart Siegel (former SC member) will move to TAC.

Erica Johnson (SCC) – is on the P&W workgroup and is WRMP program manager for the RA; previous SC member from SCC (Evyan Borgnis Sloane) was promoted to Deputy Executive Officer and is moving into a more state-wide role.

- Welcome Matt and Erica!

4) Proposed addition of new seat for Interagency Ecological Program (IEP) on Steering Committee

Jessie Olson

- This is an important way that the WRMP can coordinate better with monitoring in the Delta.
- Supports a task in the Estuary Blueprint focused on monitoring coordination.
- Steve Culberson: has worked in both Bay and Delta, interested in bridging the science efforts.

Vote: Approved

5) People and Wetlands Monitoring Plan Additions

Alex Thomsen, SF Estuary Partnership

- Recap of background about P&W workgroup:
 - People and Wetlands indicators will be incorporated into the State of Our Estuary Report
 - P & W indicators also serve Restoration Authority interests of measuring the equity impacts of their investments
 - P&W focus on equity was a key part of receiving non-competitive grant funding from EPA Program Office
 - Workgroup started in 2022, now are incorporating P&W indicators into the monitoring plan.
- Overview of P&W equity indicators
 - Products that communicate about equity and distribution of wetland benefits
 - Will have technical methods documents, won't have full SOPs since they don't involve new monitoring
- Overview of P&W human dimensions indicators
 - Monitor how people are involved with wetland restoration and management
 - Will have SOPs that will go to TAC or SC for approval, depending on which is more appropriate.
- Luisa: needs a reminder on the representation in wetland decision-making. Likes the intent of the trends, but not sure how actionable it is. It's important to keep an eye on that ball, but not sure what the information will look like.
- Renee: Super curious to see how this plays out. There are goals for wetland restoration and enhancement, and they don't necessarily match up well with community groups that are represented here. Both are important, and we need to incorporate both of them, and we need to think about how to have both of those goals. There are more opportunities for restoration that may not have direct benefits to disadvantaged communities that are also important to restore for the overall health of the estuary.
- Xavier: How will we measure progress on the representation in wetland decision-making.
- Dave Halsing (in chat): Putting this here so I don't take the time away from the meeting. But as Alex just noted, this question [about the distribution of wetland restoration in proximity to environmental justice communities] was just asked at the last SFBRA AC meeting. The truth is that there are disadvantaged communities in the central bay where it is not at all a good place to do wetland restoration (because of all of the hard development there), and there are plenty of places in the far south bay where wetland restoration is important to do but where there aren't necessarily EJ communities because they are largely commercial areas (e.g., Mountain View). Tidal wetland restoration is not an easy topic to directly relate to socioeconomic conditions.
- Renee Spenst (in chat): And also we should get at the broader benefits of wetland restoration for disadvantaged communities even if they aren't geographically that proximate.

Feedback on wetland benefits / public access map:

- The product addresses management question 5C, how are the benefits of wetlands distributed regionally and among different demographic groups?
- Audience and purposes of the public access map: EJ advocates, funders, shoreline permittees and planners
- Currently the public access components of the map are focused on proximity. Important to figure out how to express benefits from disadvantaged communities that aren't proximate.

Discussion:

- Dylan (in chat): Thanks for this presentation Alex. Can you briefly mention, how/if this work overlaps with the DSP National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis (NCEAS) workgroup project you're involved with?
- Erica Johnson (in chat): [This product] makes sense for SFBRA and SCC as funders who have staff and Advisory Comm members review and approve projects
- Laura Feinstein: This information is important for us to design projects with multiple benefits. It's not just the proximate neighborhoods that are benefitting wetland restoration. Urban planners have thoughts about how far people are willing to travel to get to places (i.e., 15 minute cities). It might be good to bring some of those planning concepts in here.
 - Alex: we've been looking at examples from LA County parks, but we'll follow up with you for additional examples.
- Dave Halsing: Important to decouple the access to open space (public space access features) from wetland restoration. It doesn't matter whether people are looking at a beach, a slough, a wetland, a lake, a park. Worry that we are overly narrowly specifying the wetland benefits compared to general open space access. Are we confounding open space with wetlands within this effort?
 - Alex: The regionally available data on amenities and features related to public access will be available for non-wetland open space areas as well. The map will address that more broadly than wetlands.
- Erin Chappell: Be mindful that permittees might not have authority related to environmental justice. She's thinking about how other parts of CDFW could use that information – not necessarily a regulatory nexus. Might want to think about audience in terms of state, local, and federal agencies and partners. Don't need to artificially narrow that role for audiences.
- Xavier Fernandez: Thinks it's too narrow to look at just access. That doesn't help the Water Board. Would hope that we're having more discussions and dialogue with underserved communities to look at tradeoffs of access with ecological benefits, so we can help build a more complete understanding. It's not just about access. He's the EJ coordinator for the Water Board. We talk to the communities a little bit, and we want to listen to them, but they often have very specific considerations that are relevant to the community. Sometimes their concerns are relevant to our agency's interests, and sometimes they're not. We need to develop relationships so they have a more complete understanding of what the different agencies do.
- Renee Spenst: Wetlands are home to a lot of species, some of which is more sensitive to visitation. Need to recognize the need for people to have access to open spaces and wetlands, people appreciate it more if they can see it. But need to make sure there is space for species to thrive.

6) People and Wetlands Standard Operating Procedure for Representation in Wetland Decision-Making

Alex Thomsen

- The SC, not the TAC, is currently being asked to approve this SOP because there are no social scientists currently on the TAC. The TAC is recruiting members with social science expertise, so in the future the TAC may approve the P&W SOPs.
- Focus on procedural equity
- Rigorous survey development process
 - Iterative development with the People and Wetlands workgroup
 - Informed by multiple regional surveys and American Community Surveys
 - Social Science review by Bay Delta Social Science Community of Practice
 - Collaborating with UC Davis (Lubell and Gmoser-Daskalakis)
 - Approved by Institutional Review Board at the CA Dept of Health and Human Services
- Produced a comprehensive rationale document that explains why the data are being collected
- Survey questions focus on demographics, organizational perspective, and inclusivity and feedback
- Will be distributed to groups that are involved with decision-making about wetland restoration and management
- Will be repeated every 3-5 years to enable tracking change
- Criteria for groups to survey:
 - Regional scope, standing group that can be re-contacted over time, connected to a government or program that makes decisions about SF Estuary wetlands, program management / permitting staff, focused on one of the components of wetland restoration and management
 - Components of wetland restoration: planning, design, construction, permitting, monitoring
- Expected data analysis
 - Percent of groups with Tribal representation
 - Overall agreement about ability to access and participate in meetings and influence decision-making, including breakdowns by demographic groups and organizational perspectives
 - Compare respondent demographics with regional community demographics

Discussion:

- Renee Spent (in chat): There are a few NGO's such as Ducks Unlimited that meet your criteria, Ally - I'd be happy to discuss more.
- Laura Feinstein (in chat): DWR collected data on the racial makeup of water districts about two years ago. They may have some lessons learned on how best to collect this type of data. I'd have to dig through my old emails to find the name of the person who led the work. <https://cawaterlibrary.net/document/who-makes-decisions-about-californias-water/>

- Matt Ferner (in chat): That survey development process is truly an awesome example of thoroughness and diligence. Very impressive!
- Luisa: In terms of PMC of BRRIT, not sure if they would add value to this survey. Not sure they could get in this frame of mind easily. Maybe they're second tier – start with the people who are easier to engage.
 - Jana: Agreed in the chat.
- Steve Culberson (in chat): Probably best if we follow up with a phone call regarding which IEP groups might best be targeted. I'm not clear on exactly who's best qualified to help you with the survey.
 - Alex will follow up with him.
- Xavier: Not sure how useful it will be to survey the project contacts in EcoAtlas. Sometimes it's just someone entering the data. There's no parameters around who the project contact is.
- Ali Weber-Stover: Wondering if the Suisun Marsh AMAT might also be worth contacting about the permitting.
 - Alex: They're excluding sub-regional groups, only including Bay, Delta, or whole Estuary in scope.
- Renee: In EcoAtlas, you have major landowners like USFWS, EBRPD, that don't have a regional lens. Not sure that these match the criteria for having a regional scope.
- Matt: For a future iteration of data collection, there could be a deliberate focus on subregional groups if appropriate...
- Kelli McCune: Together Bay Area may be a regional group to survey, though I don't know how much they specifically focus on wetland restoration

Vote: Approved.

7) Announcements

None.

8) Adjourn