SF ESTUARY
Wetlands
Regional
Monitoring
Program

Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program
Steering Committee Meeting Notes

June 22, 2023, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Meeting Attachments
- 3/30/23 Steering Committee Meeting Minutes
- People and Wetlands Workgroup - Management Questions Proposal

Notes

2) Approval of 3/30/23 Steering Committee Meeting Minutes
- Approved

3) Vote on People and Wetlands Management Questions
- Working to develop indicators, metrics, and protocols to look at how wetlands and wetland restoration projects are supporting connections between communities and wetlands
- Been working under Guiding Question 5
- Important because data about human connections to wetlands can help with funding opportunities, inform wetland management, can provide another way of evaluating impact of restoration efforts
  - WRMP partners are interested in this, other programs are taking this direction, helps demonstrate compliance with equity requirements
- Workgroup has identified indicators to focus on, will be giving the SC an opportunity to provide feedback on the indicators and potential monitoring questions with a survey
- Proposing one revised management question and two new questions
  - Management Questions Proposal has more information about these questions
- If questions are approved, the WG will move on to develop monitoring questions and indicators
  - Then come back to SC at September meeting for approval before developing specific protocols for monitoring
  - SOPs will be developed by the WG with help from SFEP staff
- If approved, will be incorporated into the program plan with some minor revisions (also highlighted in Management Questions Proposal)
- Discussion:
  - Jessie Olson in chat: These questions could provide information helpful to Save The Bay's work – including providing data to support advocacy and funding, deepening

our external communication and public education, and guiding where we choose to take on transition-zone work. One of the most challenging aspects of our education work is drawing a clear connection between an adjacent community's daily lives and healthy tidal marsh habitat. I imagine these questions could help close that gap.

- Brenda Goeden: For future, recognize current sites in the MSN are early sites, and hopefully there will be more sites added in the future. Struggled with distributing benchmark sites with urban populations. May see more sites in the future in more urban areas as planning for SLR. Should look at urban core for more project and reference sites.
- Stuart Siegel: Management question 5B. Maybe not comfortable with the way it's worded because it's changing from an action question to a knowledge question. Is there a way to keep it as an action question?
    - Response: changed language because there isn't a clear relationship between the elements.
    - Xavier: WRMP is supposed to inform management actions. Gaining understanding is important, what are we trying to achieve with this improved understanding. At some point need to measure for if our monitoring program is effective.
    - Stuart interested in seeing how restoration, mosquito control, and public access relate.
    - Maybe remove words "understanding of"
- Dave: I love the modification to the existing question, and I think the first new question is an important add. The 2nd new question seems like a reach and much more of a long-term one. I guess it can be added now and then fleshed out in the coming years. Is that right?
- April: Thanks Alex! These management questions are really helpful for the State of the Estuary Report (SOTER) as well. For SOTER, we are interested in how healthy the Estuary is, and whether it confers benefits to people equitably. The work that the People and Wetlands Workgroup is doing with these management questions is very helpful to our thinking, and these management questions capture a lot of what we have been discussing in terms of shoreline protection, health and wellbeing, and access to nature provided by wetlands. SOTER is also interested in understanding what monitoring data is needed to improve our understanding of how and where these benefits are provided.
- Dave: Am I correct that the People & Wetlands Workgroup has separate funding with a shorter time frame. If that's the case, then maybe are there some other questions about shoreline resilience and marsh establishment/sediment supply, etc. that we could move into these management questions? Because it sure seems to me like there are at least a few crossover items that might be able to move ahead earlier using this funding and thereby serve both sets of MQ's. (I could be wrong, I suppose...)

- Sasha: There was also discussion in the People and Wetland workgroup meetings about how there might be different ideas about the "optimal" balance of these different factors, and they might vary in different sites, for example between fish and wildlife support and public access. So there was interest in finding an alternative to the word "optimize".

- Wording for Management Question 5B updated: What monitoring data and/or analyses are needed to improve the relationships between tidal marsh restoration, fish and wildlife support, and mosquito and vector control, and public access?
- People and Wetlands new Management Questions approved
- Please fill out survey about indicators by July 7th: [survey about People & Wetlands indicator topics & draft monitoring questions]

4) **Monitoring Plan and SOPs: Updates and Guardrails**

Desired outcomes: Share rationale for near-term monitoring priorities and SOP development with SC, get feedback from the Steering Committee about their priorities for very-near-term products, solicit SC opinions on "guardrails" for development of the monitoring plan and SOPs.

- **Overview**
    - Right now we are a small program with limited funding for near-term monitoring
    - Have a little overlap with ambient monitoring and special studies
    - As program grows, would like to overlap with permit-required monitoring
    - Monitoring plans and SOPs will help us get there
- **Monitoring Plan overview and rationale – priorities for very near term (1-year) products**
    - Implementation strategy: the who, what, when, where, why
    - Proposes plan for monitoring over next 1-2 years (funded) and 3-5 years (unfunded)
    - Audience: SC, land managers, funders, regulators
    - Very-near-term monitoring activities are consistent with near-term science goals
        - Standardize analyses of regional wetland characteristics from the Baylands Change Basemap
        - Conduct CRAM assessments of select WRMP priority sites
        - Deploy new SETs (sediment elevation table) in underrepented areas
- **How SOPs fit into the WRMP science framework and tie in with the Monitoring Plan**
    - Methods documents, describe the how
    - Need to describe different tiers of cost/effort
    - Focusing on some core elements of monitoring that can be done in near-term
        - Plus have vision for what can be done long-term
    - Not regulatory documents
- **Fish and Fish Habitat SOP updates**
    - Has been approved by TAC
    - Had a helpful question and answer session with SC members

- In future, want to run monitoring questions by SC to make sure they reflect the management questions
- Will clarify how SOPs are intended to be used with monitoring plan
- What are the next steps after Q&A?
  - Christina meeting with workgroup leads tomorrow to discuss next steps
  - Going to develop a plan for polishing the SOP and develop a timeline for bringing back to the Steering Committee

- **Vegetation SOP updates**
  - Developed 3 component approach to monitoring
    - 1: remote sensing of dominant vegetation assemblages
    - 2: field sampling of vegetation percent cover at WRMP network sites (validation and collaboration of remote sensing or its own indicator) and photo doc monitoring-regulatory agencies interested in this
    - 3: track transition zone vegetation in select benchmark sites
  - In development now, would be a great time if you want to get involved in the technical aspects
  - Welcome comments and questions
- Discussion:
  - Luisa: Request from RA: do we have any more details on if they are prioritizing any reporting they wanted? Or we will do this in the future?
    - Wants as much clarity as possible moving forward
  - We've had some meetings about how RA is incorporating CRAM and how we can help that
  - Erica: Jessica and Evyan mentioned that with pricing structure, hoping for a model where projects could pay into WRMP for this. Photo point monitoring for SFBRA projects to complete themselves. Conversations still continuing
  - Stacy: Maybe when contacting land owners/managers, ask them what has already been done at their sites. For veg SOP are you considering ongoing control efforts for invasive plants. There are control efforts in place, so if you notice changes that’s good to note.
    - Caitlin: Doing surveys for invasive specifically is outside of scope, but can note when spotted during surveys already happening and maybe that starts an action for control.
  - Poll: Most people said it would be helpful for WRMP Monitoring Plans and SOPs to take into account costs. Most people said it would be helpful for SOPs to include most essential monitoring.
  - Luisa: There is a point in time where costs is part of decision making framework, not sure if development being where you include costs. Implementation is where costs come into account.

- Xavier: Respectfully disagrees: there are multiple ways to do monitoring. It is helpful to have a range of dollar amounts to know what's possible for monitoring. Can provide alternatives within the funding ranges. Need the funding element to know what methods are reasonable to propose.
- Stuart adding to Xavier: What level of data accuracy is needed for how data will be applied. More accurate data can be expensive, so splurge where you need more accurate information. Practicalities of data collection, some types of data collection can be impactful to physically go do it also think about vandalism.
- Renee: Agree with all previous comments, nice to develop all of desired research, but cost and level of effort intertwined with that.
- Letitia: The more work we spend on drafting things that could happen in the future is the more time taken away from staff to work on near-term achievable items.
  - SC help prioritize this and help us prioritize milestones.
- Jemma in chat: Having a clear idea of the cost estimate (for all project elements) will also help bolster any future funding proposal efforts too.
- Stacy in chat: Very good point about not destroying the marsh as you're trying to monitor it!
- Xavier in chat: Agree with Stuart. I have observed Lepidium spreading into paths used to monitor vegetation in marshes.
- Christina: All are welcome at TAC meetings to have more conversation there
- Donna: Early input will help us get deliverables out sooner

5**) Finding sustainable funding sources for the WRMP**

Desired outcomes: seek SC opinions on creative path for sustainable funding for the WRMP, and which to prioritize. Galvanize SC members to take more ownership over the financial sustainability of the program.

- Funding strategy developed in 2020
- Need funding for data collection/analysis and program management
- 2020 strategy included funding ideas: optional monitoring payment, private donations,
- Other funding ideas: shoreline adaptation fee, federal funding if there is an SFB program office at EPA, another local funding measure similar to measure AA
- Discussion:
  - Probably will need a combination of funding sources
  - Could agencies support WRMP in similar way to RMP?
    - Agencies would need to figure out what they could give up
    - Can't just be a required fee of the agencies
    - Xavier interested in exploring vegetation monitoring and could the WRMP mapping fit within requirements of site specific projects
    - For BCDC takes 18 months for regulation changes, might be more complex for other agencies

        - The idea of charging restoration projects would likely get pushback, already strapped for money
    - Maybe as people are increasing shoreline changes, could charge for that by tying back to wetlands, like maybe the project could have been a wetland.
    - BCDC has some funds sitting there for in-kind, but would need a connection to wetlands to be used.
    - Jemma in chat: (wrote this right before Brenda said it at the end :)) Could there possibly be a fee introduced related to mitigation (CDFW/RWQCB)? As in, creating a pathway for permittees to pay into said fund as part of bolstering or just flat satisfying their mitigation requirements? There would be a lot of details and it would likely depend on the project or proposed mitigation, but could be worth pursuing given all the money being spent on mitigation.
    - Xavier in chat: There are impacts to fish habitat from riprap and walls. It is worth considering a monitoring requirement, especially considering that we require monitoring of oyster restoration projects and other living shoreline projects.
    - USFWS: Regulatory document is usually a biological opinion. What they can put into a fee is limited to what they can put in the terms and conditions and is limited to effects to listed species (like exceeding take limits). At very end of BO there is a section with optional things to do that are good for species. The idea of fees is something FWS has thought of, but has kind of run into a dead end.
    - Xavier: With dredging, when you go project by project funding is highly variable year to year. With wastewater treatment plants they get funding for five years so it is sustained and spread out over the five years and similar with the stormwater projects.
- What can we do to set ourselves up for success regarding funding?
    - Luisa: we don't want a monitoring program that is essentially a mitigation bank.
    - Comes down to regulation and government funding to have long-term predictable funding
    - We can still add other sources of funding.
    - Renee: Tightening up connectivity to RA goals and the regulatory agencies would create more certainty in funding and more pathways to funding and help respective agencies view this monitoring as requirements for restoration projects.
    - Stacy in chat: Not that it's passed yet, but if it does, RAWA would vastly increase funding to the state to further goals and actions in the state wildlife action plan. Establishing connections between SWAP and WRMP in advance might position WRMP to benefit if RAWA does pass. Links to SWAP, etc here: https://www.nwf.org/Our-Work/Wildlife-Conservation/Policy/Recovering-Americas-Wildlife-Act
    - EPA program office: Once approved by Congress, would allow for more direct funding and contracts vs everyone having to compete for funding through grants.

6) **WRMP Project Updates**

Desired outcomes: Inform SC of what the WRMP staff have been up to.

- Communications plan (Sasha)
    - First early focus is developing consistent language across program documents and website
    - If interested in helping wordsmithing let Sasha know
        - Stuart can help.
    - Hoping to share updated vision and mission statement by next meeting
- Regulatory Needs Assessment (Sasha)
    - Working to integrate findings into program development
- Collaboration with Bay RMP on Sediment workgroup (Christina Toms)
    - Voted to recommend funding two special studies
    - One on spatial variability of sediment accretion in SF Bay tidal wetland restoration projects
    - Continued monitoring of expanded suspended sediment monitoring network in south bay
    - Sure thing that these will be funded
    - A lot of collaboration going on around the WRMP
- Best practices for Tribal engagement (Alex)
    - Can be found on WRMP website
    - Purpose: guide work of WRMP and partners to meaningfully engage with Tribes
    - Not specific to formal government to government consultation, but there are some resources linked at the bottom of the document

7**) New Steering Committee Chair vote**

Desired outcome: Select new SC Chair.

- Jessie Olson selected new SC chair

8) **Announcements**

- The science team submitted 5 abstracts to CERF
- Two open requests for applications at EPA
    - BIL-June 29th
    - WQIF-Aug 2nd deadline, is that a dealbreaker for those who are working with partners?