



**San Francisco Bay Joint Venture  
Conservation Delivery Committee Meeting  
April 9, 2015 10:00 am -3:00 pm  
San Francisco Estuary Institute  
4911 Central Ave, Richmond, CA 94804**

*Summary Meeting Notes*

*In attendance: Chris Barton (East Bay Regional Parks), Cecille Caterson (California State Parks), Megan Elrod (Point Blue), Patricia Gaither (Solano Land Trust), Joel Gerwein (State Coastal Conservancy, site visit only), Juliana Gonzalez (The Watershed Project), Jason Gregg (Point Blue intern), Cristina Grosso (SFEI), Marc Holmes (The Bay Institute), Anna Kennedy (Point Blue intern), Dean Kwasny (Natural Resources Conservation Service, via phone), Stuart Siegel (Siegel Environmental), Rachel Spadafore (Audubon California, via phone), Caitlin Sweeny (San Francisco Estuary Partnership), Renee Spenst (Ducks Unlimited), Laura Valoppi (US Geological Survey), Susan Wainwright de la Cruz (US Geological Survey), Sue Wickham (Solano Land Trust), Hayley Zemel (Save the Bay). SF Bay Joint Venture Staff: Beth Huning (Coordinator), Sandra Scoggin (Assistant Coordinator), Caroline Warner (Outreach Coordinator), Angela Hass (intern), Ari DeMarco (intern).*

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

Marc Holmes chaired the meeting. Attendees introduced themselves. SFEI was thanked for meeting space, refreshments and assistance.

**2. Announcements or Project Updates**

Sue Wickham - Solano Land Trust has a new project that is “shovel-ready” and only needs funding. She will get in touch with Sandra with information.

Juliana Gonzalez - Oyster Reef Restoration at Point Pinole is completed, but monitoring continues.

Rachel Spadafore & Stuart Siegel – The Sonoma Creek project in San Pablo Bay is currently bidding out construction for work, and is on schedule to break ground in June. This project will pilot upland transition/ living shorelines. Permitting through BCDC was challenging, but this project would be a good demonstration of successfully using fill for restoration projects. Stuart noted that the original design was not permitted due to too much upland transition habitat.

Megan Elrod – Two interns from Point Blue’s Climate Smart Internship were in attendance. Point Blue interns help monitor bird response to restoration and other conservation actions in the Bay, and

work with the Future Marshes tool. Interns are also available to work on monitoring projects. All data is shared via California Avian Data Center (The California node of the Avian Knowledge Network).

Laura Valoppi – The South Bay Science Symposium will be held in the South Bay on October 22 (tentatively). An announcement will be sent out. The event is looking for a larger venue to accommodate 400-500 people.

Caitlin Sweeney – The newest version of Bay Nature features Flood Control 2.0, as well as Walnut and Novato Creek Restorations, which are partners of the JV.

Mark Holmes & Hayley Zemel – The first pilot project of a horizontal levee in SF Bay will be at Oro Loma Sanitary Plant. The groundbreaking event is later today. Save the Bay did not participate in project design for this site, but is providing plants and volunteers, and will install 70,000 plants. If successful, this project could set an example for the 50+ wastewater treatment plants along the shoreline, and could be considered an experiment with scaling up restoration.

### **3. Discussion of the NRCS - Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP) Interim Final Rule.** *Dean Kwasny, NRCS*

The interim rule sets forth the policies and procedures related to the implementation of the ACEP as authorized by the 2014 Farm Bill.

Dean and Dave Smith (Intermountain West JV) identified key issues on the new ruling, and drafted response comments that will be made to the NRCS:

- 1) Issue: Concern that more money will go to Agricultural Land Easement (ALE) program than Wetland Reserve Easement (WRE) program. Comment: Provide comment to NRCS asking for review of historical allocation of programs, and ask that new allocations to be in line with those.
- 2) Issue: Access - Previously, federal land wasn't allowed to be used for conservation easement access. Regulations recently loosened this for Ag Land but not WRE. Comment: Will ask to allow this for WRE as well.
- 3) Issue: It is unclear as to how minimum deed terms are written. Comment: Ask for additional clarification on whether restoration or restrictions to land use that are agreed upon by land owners are allowed.
- 4) Issue: Under ALE, landowner is required to meet certain requirements but is not given funds to implement. Comment: Suggest to NRCS that once ALE plan is written, those plans will get priority when landowner applies to other funding sources.
- 5) Issue: Hoping to use federal funds as match for program, but can only use non-federal funds now. Comment: This is unlikely to change.
- 6) Issue: What is proof of matching funds? Comment: Will suggest that NRCS accept commitment letter at time of application as proof that matching funds are available.
- 7) Issue: Clarification that hunting and fishing are a reserved recreational right under the WRE easement deed rather than a compatible use that must be authorized by NRCS.

*Action: Dave will take the lead on summarizing and writing a comment letter, to be shared with other JVs. SFBJV will review and use as the basis for their letter which they will provide to Dean by April 28<sup>th</sup>.*

*Comments from committee members:*

- Adjacent riparian benefits are not well integrated into this document. WRE is focused on restoring and protecting wetland as defined by hydric soils, hydrology, and vegetation.
- The wording for minimum deed standards is unclear on the guidelines for haying/mowing during certain bird breeding seasons. California hasn't identified any species that would need to be considered, though it is written in to the program. Playa Lakes has a great success story of ranchers and bird conservationists working together.
- Point Blue has a "Partner Biologist" program that places biologists in NRCS offices. Contact Geoff Geupel for more information.

#### **4. JV and Partner Program Updates**

Bayland Ecosystem Habitat Goals Update – Outreach Update. *Caroline Warner*

Caroline Warner reported that the BEHGU release has been moved to the end of summer. The outreach schedule for BEHGU will be in step with the new timeline. A decision will be made soon on which communications firm to hire to help with the outreach process and the actual plan. Outreach has a \$10k budget from SFBJV, and may look for more funding. It was suggested that WCB may be able to provide this additional funding. BEHGU might be presented at the next State of the Estuary Conference.

Climate Adaptation Decision Support Final Report and Next Phase. *Beth Huning*

The website will be adapted to be more user-friendly, and will include the Bayesian tool online. The JV will contract with Point Blue for a Phase 2 climate adaptation plan for San Pablo Bay NWR. This non-binding, resource/tool will likely be available within a month. There will be more discussion at future meetings after the report is released.

Database Transition to EcoAtlas. *Sandra Scoggin and Cristina Grosso.*

The database transition into EcoAtlas is currently in Phase 1, and now anticipating an end-of-September release. Cristina gave an overview of how the new database is organized with nested levels of information:

Group (formerly called SuperProject) > Project > Site > Activity.

The new database also includes a section to add monitoring data, and might be linked to other databases – the CADS database is currently linked to show bird monitoring in or adjacent to project sites.

Suggestions were captured and included:

- The issue of how to incorporate "natural restoration" (i.e., levee failures) was raised. Stuart Siegel has "natural restoration" captured in his database and can provide information on these sites and some suggestions on how we could capture this data in our new system.
- Upland transition zones also need to be captured, possibly in the activity or habitat definitions.

There is still opportunity to comment on the new database, and more comments were solicited on project activity categorization. If you have feedback, please submit it by end of this month.

**5. Prop 1/Project Lists – Application Strategy Discussion.** *Beth Huning and Sandra Scoggin.*

The SFBJV Government Affairs Committee has been collaborating with partners and meeting with key agencies to develop collective talking points and comments on draft Prop. 1 guidelines. While a variety of programs within the bond have the potential to support some SFBJV projects, the most relevant sources of funding for the majority of SFBJV habitat projects are contained within Chapter 6, *Protecting Rivers, Lakes, Streams, Coastal Waters, and Watersheds*.

The ballot measure requires competitive grant programs. Agencies receiving funding under Chapter 6 are required to develop draft guidelines, provide for public comment and conduct at least 3 public meetings to receive public comment, finalize guidelines, and initiate the grant program this summer. Links to various agency draft guidelines can be found on the SFBJV website, [www.sfbayjv.org](http://www.sfbayjv.org)

The SFBJV submitted a letter to the Conservancy at its Oakland public meeting. The SFBJV acknowledged the “best practices” of Conservancy staff assistance to applicants and their efficient process for approving projects in a timely way. The JV also requested that the Conservancy find a way to prioritize SFBJV-supported projects, which meet SFBJV criteria and are well-vetted by the partnership.

Department of Fish and Wildlife receives \$285 million for watershed restoration programs statewide, excluding the Delta. (DFW Delta programs have their own allocation of \$87,500,000.) The \$285 million can fund coastal wetland and riparian habitat to improve ecological function, as well as acquire conservation easements from willing sellers. DFW can fund scientific studies and assessment to determine project success. The SFBJV submitted extensive comments on DFW draft guidelines and extensive application process. The JV determined that a lengthy review process could be problematic for some applicants who either have limited resources to invest in an application process or who stand to lose “match” if the timeline is too lengthy. The JV recommends that the process be efficient and not too cumbersome for an applicant. Small NGO’s can often efficiently delivery projects, but the guidelines seem to favor organizations and agencies with larger capacity to prepare applications. Therefore, the SFBJV suggested that DFW periodically solicit proposals for smaller grants. The SFBJV discouraged single-species RFP’s and encouraged DFW to fund multi-benefit projects.

The Wildlife Conservation Board receives \$200 million for projects that result in enhanced stream flow. WCB joined with the Department of Fish and Wildlife to hold joint public meetings. WCB draft guidelines can be found at <https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=93852&inline> . The SFBJV is currently reviewing the draft WCB guidelines and formulating comments to be submitted by the April 24<sup>th</sup> deadline. JV partners are encouraged to comment as well.

Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta Conservancy is receiving \$50 million. The SFBJV has not yet determined whether to provide comments to the Delta Conservancy, as most of the SFBJV projects lie on the Contra Costa County mainland, for example Dutch Slough and various Marsh Creek projects.

While it is premature to be promoting individual projects, Sandra Scoggin and our interns have been working closely with SFBJV project partners to update all project information in our database. Having accurate project information will enable the JV to provide lists and recommendations on

projects that best fit agency guidelines and SFBJV priorities. The most recent list was circulated and partners were encouraged to review and get in touch with corrections and additions.

The JV is considering putting together an effectiveness monitoring proposal that will give an overview of the impact of restoration projects being done on target species.

## **6. North American Waterfowl Management Plan Summary Presentation and Recommendations.**

Susan de la Cruz presented an abbreviated version of her presentation “2015 NAWMP assessment: waterfowl monitoring and research within the SFBJV region”. The presentation will be made available on the JV website.

Key points included:

- SFBJV waterfowl primary objective: Scaup, scoters, canvasbacks at peak 1989-90 counts.
- Secondary objective: ruddy duck, pintail, shovelers, mallards at 1987-90 average counts.
- Revised bird population objectives are in progress, using stepped-down NAWMP population objectives.
- The MWS is used by SFBJV partners for setting objectives, planning, restoration monitoring, minimizing disturbance impacts, informing harvest regulations, and evaluating the effects of climate change.
- Redesign of MWS would be helpful to reduce sampling effort, improve spatial coverage, account for imperfect detection, and improve safety.
- The ability to model carrying capacity and the availability of habitat are key to conservation of waterbird populations throughout different habitats (subtidal, intertidal flats, and managed ponds) in the SF Bay region.

Beth Huning summarized the 2015 NAWMP Recommendations to SFBJV.

General observations of the SFBJV from the 2015 NAWMP Assessment:

- Smallest JV
- Highest human density
- Highest density of threatened and endangered species
- High density of wintering diving ducks, especially scaup, canvasback, ruddy ducks, and scoters.

NAWMP Recommendations to SFBJV:

- Revise the Implementation Plan with focus on waterfowl goals
- Create closer ties with Sea Duck and PBHJV
- Define what continental NAWMP goals mean across SFBJV landscapes
- Address spatial biases in apportioning temporal population abundances by proportion of species represented across SFBJV
- Show how the results of completed science projects can translate into conservation decision-making processes
- Address urban growth and sea level rise in decision-making

Capacity and Project Management Recommendations:

- Additional capacity is needed to address priority recommendations
- Develop strategies with appropriate timeline charts

Recommended Future Work for the SFBJV:

- Continue finding ways to estimate, monitor, and track net wetland changes over time
- Evaluate need for additional waterfowl habitat as climate changes and habitats are converted or impacted by human activities
- Integrate bird population, habitat, and social elements into habitat decisions
- Expand Human Dimension elements of the SFBJV program
- Promote enhancement of waterfowl resources in landscape planning
- Plan or mitigate for reduced waterfowl habitat in large scale salt pond conversion
- Continue to develop comprehensive monitoring and evaluation plans and programs for wetland habitats

Comments were solicited to be integrated into the response letter that JV Management Board will be sending. Comments are due before April 28<sup>th</sup> (next Management Board meeting) and should be emailed to Beth and Susan.

**7. Coordinator's Update.** *Beth Huning*

The Future Marshes workshop will be rescheduled for some time in May once full functionality is restored to the Point Blue servers.

The JV Government Affairs Committee put together project highlights for talking points to DC. It is available for distribution.

- 8.** The April 9 Conservation Delivery meeting adjourned to a site visit to Breuner Marsh, led by Chris Barton of East Bay Regional Park District.