

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
CALIFORNIA REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
SAN FRANCISCO BAY REGION

STAFF SUMMARY REPORT
STAFF: Andree Breaux
MEETING DATE: April 11, 2007

ITEM: 11

SUBJECT: Web-Based Wetland Tracker Pilot Project – Status Report

CHRONOLOGY: August 2006 – Requirement to provide permitted project information to Wetland Tracker added a condition in certain Water Quality Certifications issued by the Executive Officer

DISCUSSION: **Background** - A recent evaluation of compensatory mitigation projects permitted under Clean Water Act Section 401 (water quality certification) by the State and Regional Water Boards between 1991 to 2002 concluded that about 42% of the projects had compliance issues (non-compliance or compliance could not be assessed).¹ The Wetland Tracker developed by the San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI) is a web-based GIS database, which can hold large amounts of project-related information and data to facilitate project management and compliance tracking.

In August 2006, to pilot this new tool without adding any burden to our limited staff resources, Board staff started using water quality certifications to require use of a standardized form by project applicants to document permitted project information to facilitate project management and compliance tracking. The form was vetted by SFEI and other state and federal regulatory agencies and includes instructions to assist project applicants in completing the form. The form includes specific project location, the types and amount of habitat impacted and what will be enhanced, created and/or restored to compensate for the impacts, along with what success criteria must be achieved at the end of any monitoring period prescribed in the water quality certification.

Effectiveness Measurement and Other Utilities of Wetland Tracker
- Over time, the Wetland Tracker should provide important information required to track wetland losses and gains in the Region and to allow us to better demonstrate if our water quality certifications ensure

¹ An Evaluation of Compensatory Mitigation Projects Permitted Under Clean Water Act Section 401 by the California State Water Quality Control Board, 1991 – 2002, August 2006 by Richard F. Ambrose, John C. Callaway, Steven F. Lee http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/cwa401/docs/wetlandmitstudy_rpt.pdf

compliance with the State and Federal “no net loss” policy in terms of habitat acreage, linear feet, and functions. It can assist in setting grant funding priorities for wetland restoration efforts. Wetland Tracker can also be a useful planning tool for project proponents to propose mitigation that may be better connected with other mitigation or restoration efforts to provide a higher level of watershed benefit.

Both Board and SFEI staff have been gathering project information electronically and have been resolving minor problems with the types of maps submitted. About 12 projects have provided information to the Wetland Tracker so far. The form and instructions can be found at www.waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay/certs.htm.

Statewide Implications

Other regions have shown interest in using this tool. We plan to share our lessons learned with other regions. The Wetland Tracker is designed to be compatible with the State Board’s database that is still being developed for the Water Quality Certification program to allow demonstration of compliance with no net loss policy statewide.

Next Steps

Staff needs to spot check the consistency between our water quality certification conditions with what applicants have submitted; follow up with applicants who did not turn in the form or turned in an incomplete form, including poor quality maps; and conduct a small number of field investigations to determine if the information is appropriate and accurate. Staff also plans to compare the extent of the pre-permit and post-permit impacts to document the amount of impacts avoided and minimized.

At the Board hearing, Michael May of SFEI will make a presentation to demonstrate the Wetland Tracker’s major features and functions.

RECOMMEN-
DATION: Status Report – no action needed.