

Steve Williams of the Restoration Advisory Board (RAB) for the Moffett Federal Airfield in Mountain View forwarded to Water Board staff a link to the following that he posted on his "Moffett Users" blog for RAB members and the public:

"Transparent Government Hero: Elizabeth Wells of SFBRWQCB

Saturday, February 11, 2012

My hero! Kudos to Elizabeth Wells of the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board for her enlightened support of transparency in the face of the Army's lack of openness.

At the RAB meeting this week, the Army tried to defend withholding a draft report that RAB members wanted to review. The Army had already sent the draft to several agencies for comment, including the Water Board.

The Water Board naturally shared the report with RAB Co-Chair Bill Berry, who distributed it by email before the meeting. As a result, RAB members were able to review it before the Army's presentation at the RAB meeting, so we could ask the right questions and give an informed response.

EPA's Alana Lee also proactively shared the document with the RAB.

That kind of community involvement lets the Army show they're being a good neighbor. That's a good thing!

But at the RAB meeting, the Army, and especially Bob Rowden of the Army's Environmental Command, defended withholding the report. He said it's Army policy not to release draft documents. And he justified withholding the draft because public comment isn't required by law. That ignores the political reality: The Army has neighbors, both NASA Ames and the surrounding communities, and the Army needs to get along with them. That often means showing openness that exceeds the legal requirements.

And, anyway, it's silly to withhold a public document that must be shared with other agencies, like the Water Board, who have more enlightened policies.

I urge the Army to update its policy to meet the reality of public involvement in the modern era."