Alameda Creek Fisheries Restoration Workgroup

Minutes of Meeting

July 23, 2003
Alameda County Public Works Agency

Attendees

Pete Alexander	EBRPD
Gordon Becker	CEMAR
Brenda Buxton	State Coastal Conservancy
Laurel Collins	ACFCWCD consultant
Todd Crampton	Geomatrix
Chris Gray	Supervisor Haggerty's Office
Andy Gunther	CEMAR
Craig Hill	ACWD
Laura Kilgour	ACFCWCD
Jay Kinberger	U.S. Army Corps
Erika Cleugh	DFG
Jeff Miller	ACA
Josh Milstein	SFPUC
Stuart Moock	PG&E
Barbara Palacios	SFPUC
Diedra Pell	SFPUC
Brian Sak	SFPUC
Larry Serpa	The Nature Conservancy
Gary Stern	NOAA Fisheries
Jim Watson	HDR
Richard Wetzig	ACFCWCD

Announcements

Laura Kilgour announced that the Steelhead Festival, while having fewer runners than last year, had more attendees and was a success.

Updates

§1135 Process. Jay Kinberger said that he has acquired funds to start PMP-related tasks. Corps staff have begun the feasibility study that examines what surveys exist in relation to the proposed project and what additional surveys may be necessary. Jay noted that baseline hydrology information would be collected early on in this process. Josh Milstein and Richard Wetzig noted that SFPUC and ACFCWCD hydrologists would share information already developed by their agencies. CEMAR's survey work for the Re-graded Channel Alternative study also applies to the Corps' data collection effort, and will be shared with Corps staff.

SFPUC Activities. Josh Milstein told the Workgroup that Pat Martel visited with Interior Department staff in Washington to discuss establishing a joint permitting office in San Francisco for CIP-related projects. Participating agencies likely would include USFWS, NOAA Fisheries, and the Army Corps of Engineers.

Josh described a new forum whereby SFPUC staff responsible for CIP projects are meeting with environmental interests regarding water supply, growth, and other related concerns. Jeff Miller represents the ACA in this process, and Gordon Becker will report on the meetings to the Workgroup.

Josh said that ENRTIX has completed a draft water release study that addresses water losses in the Sunol Valley, particularly losses related to RMC mining operations. Such losses are important in relation to potential future flows established for smolt out-migration. A new mining lease including provision for a study analyzing water losses has not moved through the Board. Josh recommended bringing this issue to the attention of the PAC.

Finally, Josh brought to the Workgroup's attention recent developments regarding quarrying in the Apperson Ridge area of the upper Alameda Creek watershed. The County is using an approximately 20-year old EIR to describe the impacts and mitigation measures associated with proposed mining activities. Josh stated his opinions that such activities could have adverse effects on steelhead restoration and that interested parties should express their concerns to the County.

Agenda Items

Conceptual Engineering Report (CER) for the Sunol and Niles Dam Removal Project. Barbara Palacios introduced the SFPUC's consultants on this project and told the Workgroup that the CER has been posted to the Workgroup web site. Comments are requested as soon as possible to allow the PUC to maintain its schedule. The PUC has retained ESA to conduct the environmental review process, and a draft EIR is expected at the end of January to be followed by a Final EIR in May. If the schedule is maintained, dam removals will be conducted simultaneously in the 2005 dry season.

As part of the CER preparation process, channel materials behind Sunol Dam were sampled by crane, including seven locations in both downstream and upstream locations. The samples were tested for a variety of contaminants and results indicated that impounded material is suitable for disposal in a non-hazardous materials landfill. The grain sizes encountered in the sampling indicate that the dredged materials also may be useful in commercial applications, thus reducing disposal costs.

Sunol Dam was constructed in 1910 at a height of 28 feet. Ten feet of the dam is exposed presently above grade. The PUC's consultants detailed the proposed removal method, which involves notching the dam first, then removal of the upper seven feet of the dam, then creation of a low flow channel and filling of the downstream plunge pool. During construction, the creek would be routed to an existing aquaduct with a capacity of about 50 cfs. Channel contours would be re-established based on historic cross sections and profiles of the site developed at the time of dam construction.

Niles Dam was built in two phases in 1841 and 1887 to a height of about eight feet. Dam removal at this site would be performed similarly to the Sunol removal, and an existing low flow channel in the vicinity of the dam would be used to divert flows during construction.

Questions to the PUC's consultants following their presentation were centered largely on the basis for determining the depth below grade of the dam removal. Specifically, the choice of placing about two feet of channel material atop the Sunol Dam in the area of thinnest cover was explored. Consultants explained that design was based on the historic channel configuration as well as the intention to maintain an area upstream from the abandoned portion of the dam where groundwater transport was hindered. This configuration was envisioned maintaining conditions favorable to the health of riparian vegetation.

Several Workgroup participants noted the dynamic nature of channel features, particularly with regard to possible changes in the sediment budget. Land development, land management improvements, and structural erosion control projects may lead to lower upstream sediment loads carried by Alameda Creek flows in the future. Possible incision of the creek channel could lead to exposing the abandoned dam, and formation of a downstream plunge pool that could constitute a fish migration barrier. SFPUC staff agreed to revisit design criteria based on comments submitted by various Workgroup members.

Supplementation Subgroup Meeting Summary. Gordon Becker reviewed the subgroup meeting of the 22nd, in which an outline of a migrant study program was discussed. The program involves installing video cameras at the BART weir to improve the efficiency of locating in-migrating steelhead, and trapping fish using seines and dip nets. Captured fish would be tagged, tissue (fin clip?) samples would be taken, and the fish would be transported and released in upstream locations. Stonybrook Creek has been selected as a likely release site based on the behavior of previously tagged steelhead, likely landowner cooperation, and favorable spawning and rearing habitat conditions.

Gary Stern noted that the information gained through such a program would help with long-term management practices that will need to be established as part of the restoration process. Craig Hill and Josh Milstein expressed their agencies' concerns that take liability could result from such a program, noting that their participation would depend on adequate legal protection through a section 7 consultation. Gary Stern agreed that this was a crucial element of the program, and offered to meet with ACWD and SFPUC representatives to discuss issues related to water supply operations and take provision. Brain Sak told the Workgroup that the SFPUC continued to be interested in using reservoir fish in a study and supplementation program, and offered to help develop an outline for this activity in cooperation with the CEMAR team.

Re-graded channel alternative study update. Gordon Becker said that surveys had been performed to collect data for the HEC-RAS model that analyzes hydrologic conditions in the vicinity of the BART weir. Members of the Technical Advisory Committee for the project will be contacted shortly to schedule a meeting to discuss the study approach.

Stonybrook Creek improvements conceptual design project. Gordon told the Workgroup that Brenda Buxton had expressed optimism that the Coastal Conservancy would contribute sufficient funds to the Stonybrook Road Crossing Improvements Conceptual Design project to allow it to go forward in the early fall. In response to Erika Cleugh's concerns that a more complete design would not result from the expenditure of about $80,000 on this project, Gordon said that additional barrier analysis and landowner outreach had been added to the design work to increase the project's chances of success. Erika also was told that the Workgroup would seek only implementation funds from DFG.

East Span Bay Bridge mitigation fund update. CEMAR contacted Eric Schmidt of NOAA Fisheries prior to the Workgroup meeting for an update on the Bay Bridge mitigation fund. Eric said that there still is no date set for RFP issuance, and that the process may be complicated by DFG's desire to participate more fully in fund administration. CEMAR offered to draft a letter to Caltrans management expressing Workgroup members' desire to expedite the mitigation fund process. This letter will be distributed to interested Workgroup members for their organizations to customize prior to delivery to Caltrans.

Union Sanitary District Trunk Line Crossing. Richard Wetzig summarized recent events in the planning of a trunk line crossing of Alameda Creek in the vicinity of the I-880 freeway. At issue is the planned depth of three feet below grade in the flood control channel. ACFCWCD has expressed concerns that a sufficiently large storm event could damage an inadequately covered pipe,

leading to a sewage release. NOAA Fisheries is seeking assurance that the pipe does not become exposed in the future and create a migratory barrier for fish. A meeting of USD and ACFCWCD staff, regulators, and consultants was planned for July 29th which will be described at the next Workgroup meeting.

Next Workgroup Meeting. The next meeting of the Workgroup is scheduled for Wednesday, September 24th, at 9:30 a.m. at ACFCWCD. A summary of progress on the steelhead supplementation subgroup's efforts will be made, as well as updates on PUC planning issues, the Re-graded Channel Alternative study, and the Stonybrook Road Crossing Improvements project. Workgroup members are invited to submit additional agenda topics to CEMAR for inclusion in the agenda, which will be circulated prior to the meeting.