

Alameda Creek Fisheries Restoration Workgroup

Minutes of Meeting

September 14, 2004

Alameda County Public Works Agency

Attendees

Pete Alexander	EBRPD
Deirdre Appel	SFPUC
Kristine Atkinson	DFG
Gordon Becker	CEMAR
Brenda Buxton	State Coastal Conservancy
Eric Cartwright	ACWD
Laurel Collins	Watershed Sciences
Chris Gray	Supervisor Haggerty's Office
Andy Gunther	CEMAR
Craig Hill	ACWDright
Mike Horvath	SFPUC
Dave Houts	Zone 7 Water Agency
Jane Lavelle	SFPUC
Jeff Miller	ACA
Stuart Moock	PG&E
Jeremy Sarrow	SFPUC
Carla Schulteis	ACFCWCD
Gary Stern	NOAA Fisheries
Richard Wetzig	ACFCWCD

Announcements

Gary Stern announced that NOAA Fisheries extended the comment period on the agency's salmon and steelhead status review through October 20th. Gary noted that public meetings would be held in Rohnert Park on September 23rd at 6:30 at the Doubletree and in Monterey on September 28th at 6:30 at the Monterey Beach Resort.

Gordon Becker said that the proposed policy for rainbow trout in the upper Alameda Creek watershed had encouraged the flood district to revise its approach to the in-migrant study and forego the construction of a smolt trap. The district has been advised that the presence of listed fish in the upper watershed will require on-going efforts to reduce take potentially caused by agency activities. Steelhead possibly moved upstream of the flood control channel would not constitute an introduction of a listed species and therefore would not create a new "landscape" for agency operations. Gordon said that due to cost, permitting, and staffing considerations, abandoning the smolt trap portion of the project was preferred by the flood district. Gordon noted that he was seeking comment on the revised approach from other agencies operating in the watershed.

Andy Gunter asked Gary if a “due diligence” approach to avoiding take was consistent with NOAA Fisheries expectations. Gary responded affirmatively, but suggested that agencies attempt to develop a timetable for implementing such projects as barrier modifications, screen installations, and water releases for habitat. Craig Hill requested a meeting with NOAA Fisheries to discuss such issues so that his and other agencies affected by the proposed policy would be able to prepare comments by the October 20 deadline that reflect a complete understanding of the situation.

Updates

SFPUC and PAC activities. Jane Lavelle announced the next PAC meeting would occur in the week of September 20. The SFPUC also was planning to conduct a meeting concerning chiefly fisheries issues and involving the new general manager.

Jane reported on a site visit by agency and SFPUC staff to Sunol and Niles dams. Gary noted that sediment transport issues now have been examined more thoroughly than when the project was first proposed. The analysis led to a project design change: the entire length of Sunol dam will be lowered rather than a portion. Analysis also suggests that impounded channel materials can be left in place without significant effects on deposition of fines in the flood control channel. According to Gary, the abutment of Niles dam opposite the highway could be a problem in the future, and NOAA Fisheries recommends removing it as part of that project.

Pete Alexander asked if ACFCWCD would assume responsibility for downstream sedimentation that could result from the project. Richard Wetzig responded that while the prediction is for only a small quantity of sediment to be transported into the flood control channel, the district does not want extra sediment (beyond normal loads) “in their lap.” Gary Stern suggested that the SFPUC and ACFCWCD attempt to achieve agreement on this issue without resorting to modeling, as the costs of developing such a model could exceed a potential “impact fee” for possible sediment effects.

Gary mentioned that another meeting on Niles and Sunol dam removals issues would be conducted on September 30 at NOAA Fisheries in Santa Rosa. The projects are expected to be implemented in summer 2005.

Jeff Miller suggested that the PAC consider going to Congress to fund necessary restoration activities. Jeff noted that no funding mechanism is currently in place for the BART weir fish passage project, and stated the creek alliance’s position that the expectation of timely progress requires this step.

According to Jane, the SFPUC is conducting a “needs assessment and alternatives analysis” for the inflatable dam project. She expects an RFP for the project’s environmental review to be issued shortly.

Finally, Jane told the Workgroup that the SFPUC is examining fisheries objectives for Calaveras Reservoir. Part of a new ENTRIX scope of work will be studies supporting fisheries management in the reservoir.

Agenda Items

Report on Alameda Creek watershed tour. Mike Horvath passed out materials showing various portions of the Alameda Creek watershed. The images were produced primarily from a helicopter tour of the watershed and a field trip attended by SFPUC, DFG and NOAA Fisheries staff in August.

Mike said that researchers had seen adult trout holding in Arroyo Hondo pools during the summer months. He also reported that this year's rainfall amount and timing had led to decreased pool extent in areas previously snorkeled during fish surveys. He noted that trout were seen both upstream and downstream of the ACDD. He speculated that the population upstream of the natural slide on Arroyo Hondo were now resident (as opposed to adfluvial), a natural history trait likely manifested in their relatively small adult size.

Reservoir population issues. Mike's report led to a discussion of fisheries management issues related to the SFPUC reservoir populations. Kristine Atkinson noted that the SFPUC's mandated lowering of the surface water elevation at Calveras Reservoir has the potential to create an area of no low-flow channel between the reservoir and Arroyo Hondo.

DFG notes that under current conditions, storm flows may not establish a hydrologic connection between the reservoir and the established Arroyo Hondo channel (i.e., the "mouth" of the stream prior to reservoir lowering). Under this condition, fish from the reservoir would have limited access to spawning areas, smolts produced in tributaries could have difficulty migrating to the reservoir, and post-spawning adults could have problems returning to the reservoir. DFG also has concerns regarding the carrying capacity of the reservoir system due to its decreased size.

Kristine said that DFG recommends that the SFPUC monitor fish passage this winter, including the magnitude and frequency of passage flows. Based on this monitoring, it may be appropriate to create an artificial low flow channel to allow for fish passage.

PAC steelhead restoration planning strategy/Master Plan. Due to problems with large file transfer using the Workgroup "majordomo" account, members did not receive the documents Brenda Buxton was hoping to have reviewed. Brenda and CEMAR staff asked members to look for a subsequent message explaining the requested review, and the location of the documents to be reviewed. Brenda said that a cost estimate had been prepared for the ""stakeholder audit" for about \$16,000. Brenda also reported that URS had estimated the cost for preparing a Master Plan for Alameda Creek steelhead restoration at about \$200,000, similar to the estimate developed by CEMAR.

Funding opportunities. Andy Gunther announced that an RFP for Bay Bridge mitigation money is expected soon. CEMAR also received notice from Ted Frink of DWR that significant restoration money may be available this fall through DWR programs. The Workgroup agreed to reconvene upon issuance of the Bay Bridge RFP to develop application strategy and materials. Andy recommended that Workgroup members attempt to contact people "inside" the major funding organizations.

Webcam. Andy said that a sophisticated camera had been identified that appears to suit the needs of the BART weir well. The cost of this camera and its associated signal relay equipment is expected to exceed CEMAR's original estimates. Andy asked that agencies with facilities in the vicinity of the BART weir consider the ability of these facilities to house equipment allowing the Webcam signal to be broadcast on the Web. Pete Alexander responded that EBRPD facilities at Quarry Lakes could be suitable.

Stonybrook Creek improvements conceptual design project. Gordon said that sub-consultants had completed geotechnical work and surveying for the project. The information generated in these efforts will be used to begin conceptual design work of the two road crossing improvements.

Re-graded channel alternative study. Gordon handed out draft drawings and a cost estimate for the re-graded channel fish passage project to ACWD, the Coastal Conservancy, and ACFCWCD, and posted an artist's rendering of the project. He said that the next step in the project was to review the conceptual design with passage engineers from NOAA Fisheries and DFG. Preliminary estimates indicate that the project would cost substantially more than the proposed fish ladder, but that it could have substantial fish passage efficiency and water supply consolidation advantages.

Eric Cartwright provided CEMAR with a draft write-up of costs associated with replacing water supply features that would be lost to the re-graded channel approach. This information will be combined with re-grade costs and presented in a comparison table in the project's report.

Next Workgroup meeting. The next Workgroup meeting will be held on October 14th at 9:30 a.m. at ACFCWCD. Workgroup members are invited to contact Gordon with agenda items for the next meeting.