DIRECTOR'S REPORT

March 16, 2022

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Estuary Blueprint 2022 Update

After two years of work with hundreds of fantastic collaborators and the consistent guidance of the Blueprint Update Steering Committee and the Implementation Committee, I am pleased to announce that we now have a Final Draft of the 2022-2027 Estuary Blueprint!

The Final Draft will be presented for potential approval at the March 16th IC meeting. Following IC approval, the 2022 Blueprint will require the approval of the Executive Council and U.S. EPA, after which the new updated Blueprint will be finalized and released, and we will begin implementation and tracking!

Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program

The Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program (WRMP) is already having a landmark year with major programmatic and technical accomplishments. In 2021, the WRMP Steering Committee supported the co-management of the program by SFEP and SFEI. Since then and with the formation of the Program Charter, WRMP Staff from these two organizations have been working jointly to advance key program priorities.

The WRMP is currently managed across multiple funding sources covering the following core program areas of data management, science implementation, communications and engagement, and program management. In December 2021, the SF Bay Restoration Authority Governing Board approved funding of the WRMP. Funding will support alignment of WRMP and SFBRA performance metrics, and establishment of the WRMP Monitoring Network. In addition, the EPA Wetland Program Development Grant and Water Quality Improvement Fund are both providing support for key program elements. This includes a grant received in February 2022 to support broader community and tribal engagement, greater alignment with regulatory partners and expansion of the data management system. The WRMP Newsletter will be providing more frequent (quarterly) program updates. To subscribe, go to https://www.wrmp.org/.

COMPLETED PROJECTS

Integrated Regional Water Management Grant Round 2
Redwood City Bayfront Channel and Atherton Canal Flood Improvement and Habitat Restoration Project

The City of Redwood City has completed work on the Bayfront Canal/Atherton Channel project, which alleviates local flooding by routing flood flows into managed ponds that are part of the South Bay Salt Ponds Restoration Project. For the past several decades, high tides have kept flows in the Canal and Channel from draining to the Bay, when even minor rainfall events have resulted in the flooding of nearby mobile home parks and businesses. These properties have experienced flooding 40 times over the last 70 years, most recently in 2017.

The City, in partnership with Menlo Park, Atherton, San Mateo County, and the new San Mateo County Flood & Sea Level Rise Resiliency District, helped design and built the flood control project with partial funding for $1.238 million from the California State Department of Water Resources under a grant through the Integrated Regional Water Management Round 2 Grant Program, which SFEP managed through closeout to the end of 2021. Benefits include improved water quality and ecosystem benefits to the managed ponds as well as flood protection to upstream residents and infrastructure.

(Photo: Bayfront Canal/Atherton Channel flood control infrastructure. Credit: OneShoreline)

San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority
Encinal Dune Restoration and Public Access Project

East Bay Regional Park District has completed the Encinal Dune Restoration Project, located along the shoreline in the City of Alameda. The project removed invasive ice plant and a rusting barge, restored dune habitat, stabilized eroding shoreline and established a beach nourishment program for the sandy beach at Encinal Beach. The project improved water access and created new trail linkages to the Encinal Boat Ramp and Alameda Point Trail. The site will provide habitat for three federally listed bird species and is a popular site for non-motorized watercraft recreation. The project was partially funded under a $450,000 grant under Measure AA which closed out in February 2022.

Photo: Newly created dune habitat at Encinal Beach. Credit: East Bay Regional Park District.

NEW FUNDING

Wetland Regional Monitoring Program

As reported above, the Wetland Regional Monitoring Program added two new funding sources. SFEP co manages the WRMP in partnership with the SF Estuary Institute.

- The SF Bay Restoration Authority will fund $2,915,000 to the WRMP. Funding will support alignment of WRMP and SFBRA performance metrics, and establishment of the WRMP Monitoring Network.

- The US Environmental Protection Agenda Wetland Program Development Grant will fund $569,366 to the WRMP. Funding will support community and tribal engagement, regulatory alignment and expansion of the data management system.

COMMUNICATIONS

ESTUARY News Magazine

The March issue of ESTUARY News is an ambitious, 28 page feature all about fish! Stories of fins and scutes, smelt and salmon, gut rot and egg loss, and the myriad fishes tracked, tagged, trawled and hatched in the SF Estuary.

Knee Deep Times

The region has a new digital magazine featuring stories from the frontlines of climate resilience. Produced by Estuary News Group, KneeDeepTimes launched in September 2021 with funding from the Bay Area Regional Collaborative and support from SFEP. Check out the recent article on Horizontal Levees with quotes from our own Josh Bradt and Heidi Nutters!

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

SFEP Staff Retreat

SFEP staff were thrilled to all be together in person for the first time in two years for a staff retreat held on a sunny day in February! With the 2022 Estuary Blueprint nearing completion, staff focused on identifying new ways to improve how we internally track Blueprint progress as well as how to improve how we implement the Blueprint, both internally and with partners. We also spent time brainstorming a range of strategic ideas for use of new funds over the next five years, which will help inform the development of a program for the incoming Federal Infrastructure Law funding as well as other state and federal funding opportunities. We look forward to continuing to pursue the fantastic and strategic ideas generated at the retreat and bringing forward various elements to the IC this coming year.

IC Changes

With Amy Hutzel's new appointment as Executive Officer of the State Coastal Conservancy (congratulations, Amy!), she needs to step away from some of her former Bay-focused responsibilities to make way for the rest of the State! I know you all join me in thanking Amy for her hard work and dedication as a long time IC member, including a stint as Chair. She will be missed but assures me that the San Francisco Estuary will always be among her top priorities!

Stepping into Amy's shoes at the primary representative for the Coastal Conservancy on the IC is Moira McEnespy. Moira is the Regional Manager for the San Francisco Bay Area Program of the Conservancy and has a long history of work in the Estuary region. Welcome, Moira!

Staff Changes

We welcome Carmen Zamora, our 2022-2023 California Sea Grant Fellow! Carmen is assisting with development of the Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program (WRMP) and the Transforming Urban Water Initiative. Carmen is interested in linking marine science and vulnerable communities for equitable solutions in coastal management through policy changes. Her master's research compared adaptation management strategies used to combat sea level rise in estuaries in Southern California. She also developed a virtual tour of Ormond Beach estuary habitats (Oxnard, CA) in efforts to connect under-resourced Hispanic communities to coastal wetlands in Ormond Beach. Prior to graduate school, Carmen worked as an Environmental Scientist overseeing counties throughout the state for water quality and hazardous waste standards under the Aboveground Petroleum Storage Act. Carmen holds a B.S. in Environmental Studies from Sacramento State University and an M.A.S. in Marine Biodiversity and Conservation from Scripps Institute of Oceanography at UC San Diego.