



DIRECTOR'S REPORT

November 14, 2023

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

State of the Estuary Conference



The Save the Date announcement for the 2024 State of the San Francisco Estuary Conference (March 12-13, 2024) was released on October 6th to over 6,000 estuary contacts including agency staff, CBOs, public and private organizations, past attendees, and more. The event will be held at the Henry J. Kaiser Center in Oakland. Keep an eye on the [Conference website](#) for more information!

The [call for poster abstract submissions](#) has been released to the public with a due date of November 13th with expected short extension, and the [call for awardees](#) for the Jean Auer, Creative Environmental, and Outstanding Environmental Project awards has also been released with a due date of Jan 5th, 2024.

Registration for the conference will tentatively open on January 15th, 2024. For the first time, the conference will host an optional workshop on the day prior to the event at a nearby location which will be focused on environmental justice.

Estuary Youth Council

The Estuary Youth Council is currently half-way through its pilot year and has partnered with three (3) community-based organizations Mycelium Youth Network, Nuestra Casa, and Restore the Delta serving frontline, underserved communities in Oakland, East Palo Alto, and Stockton, respectively. In its first quarter (April-June), bi-monthly meetings to co-develop the Estuary Youth Council structure were held between all stakeholders to review recruitment, summer programming, and professional and leadership development opportunities. In its second quarter (July-September), nine (9) youth aged 16-24 were recruited by the community-based organization partners and onboarded onto the Estuary Youth Council. Youth and all stakeholders participated in three

"Summer Sessions", which were all-day excursions that involved experiential learning out in the field and covered pressing Estuary-related topics such as sea level rise adaptation, harmful algal blooms, restoring natural hydrology of waterways for increased flows, industrialization of the estuary's shoreline, and increasing future generation's civic engagement, participation, and stewardship of the Estuary.

In October, Youth attended professional development events around the Bay-Delta, including: the San Mateo Climate Summit, the Bay Area Youth Climate Summit, the Just Futures Summit, and more.



The Estuary Youth Council, CBO partners, and SFEP staff pose for a picture after a pontoon boat tour of the Alviso wetlands.

More information about the Estuary Youth Council can be found at this link: <https://www.sfestuary.org/estuary-youth-council/>.

Estuary Blueprint Progress

The Estuary Blueprint Steering Committee wrapped up its final meeting of 2023 with a discussion of Blueprint Task 23-2 from Action 23 (Trash): Develop an indicator based on regionally meaningful metrics of trash in the Estuary and its watersheds for use in the State of the Estuary Report.

Task 23-2 was identified by staff as being unlikely to advance within the five-year tracking time frame of the 2022 Estuary Blueprint. The committee held a robust discussion of the task and developed a set of next steps to provide staff with guidance for the task. This approach will be used in the future, in the event that any other tasks are identified as unlikely to advance. Please see the attached memo for more information on Task 23-2 and next steps.

Wetland Migration Workshop

On September 18-19, SFEP, the Coastal Conservancy, and Save The Bay hosted a Wetland Migration Workshop. The hybrid workshop was hosted online and at the Bay Area Metro Center. The event brought together over 125 restoration practitioners, including planners, funders, community-based group members,

ecologists, engineers, and regulators. The workshop covered a broad spectrum of wetland migration project considerations – from community engagement to design, construction, and monitoring. In recent years, many wetland migration projects in the San Francisco Estuary have progressed into the planning and implementation stage. Special attention was given to wetland migration zones that have either been permitted or completed to highlight successes and failures of on-the-ground projects. Recordings of the presentations are available on [SFEP's YouTube Channel](#) and links to the presentation slide decks are available on the [workshop webpage](#).



Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program

The WRMP welcomes Jessie Olson (Save The Bay) as the new Steering Committee Chair!

The WRMP established near-term monitoring priorities for data collection and analysis through June 2025, using current funding from the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority and in-kind matching program funds. These initial monitoring activities will track restoration progress (acreage) and measure tidal marsh extent. Additionally, at select sites within the WRMP monitoring site network the activities will take stock of how well marshes are functioning, and assess which marshes, if any, are showing early indications of drowning due to sea level rise.

Initial monitoring activities include:

- Conduct regional analyses of wetland extent and characteristics from the Baylands Change Basemap.
- Conduct California Rapid Assessment Methods (CRAM) assessments of WRMP Priority Network Sites.
- Deploy new Sediment Elevation Tables-Marker Horizons (SET-MHs) in underrepresented sub-regions and conduct region-wide SET-MH data collection in collaboration with the USGS.

NEW FUNDING

State of the Estuary Platform - \$1,000,000 (State Water Resources Control Board)

SFEP has accepted funding for \$1 million from the California State Water Resources Control Board's State Revolving Fund to build an updated State of the Estuary Report in the form of a dynamic, online platform. The platform will build upon previous reports, and staff will coordinate with partners on updating and reporting on indicators of Estuary health.

Climate Adaptation: Local/Regional Partnerships - \$909,800 (US EPA BIL Yr 2)

The second year of BIL funding (BIL Yr2) was awarded to SFEP in early October 2023. The BIL Yr2 workplan includes tasks within the climate adaptation planning, equity, and communication programmatic focus areas. Climate adaptation planning tasks include the relaunch the North Richmond Community Advisory Board that will be expanded to include the entire Wildcat Creek watershed, the development of the Novato Creek OLU adaptation strategy, and internal technical capacity building. Equity tasks include the creation of an SFEP Equity Team that will examine internal and external opportunities and approaches to advance equity, grant writing support for CBO's and Tribes, and the second year of the Estuary Youth Council. BIL Yr2 will continue to support ongoing outreach and communications efforts and will finalize the Outreach and Communication Program Plan that future outreach and communication efforts will stem from.

SF Bay Regional Water Board Permit Assistance - \$660,983 (Valley Water)

SFEP received a renewed 2-year contract from the Santa Clara Valley Water District (Valley Water) to continue to provide assistance to the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board on regulatory tasks related to the work of Valley Water. SFEP's Susan Glendening will continue to provide that assistance.

Sediment Solutions - \$64,100 (SFEI/USEPA)

The San Francisco Estuary Institute was awarded funding in the US EPA's 2022 San Francisco Bay Water Quality Improvement fund to implement the project Sediment Solutions: Integrated Sediment Management for Watershed–Bayland Ecosystem Resilience. The project is a partnership among water agencies, restoration practitioners, regulatory agencies, scientists, communities, and other stakeholders focused on operationalizing cutting-edge science to inform the implementation of multi-benefit management approaches that provide more sediment for bayland resilience while also enhancing creek health. This project will develop sediment reuse strategies for increasing the reuse of up to 45,000 tons of flood control channel sediment in the near-term, implement pilot reuse projects that help restore several acres of tidal marsh and transition zone habitat and critical creek habitat, develop creek-marsh reconnection landscape visions that support the resilience of up to 95 acres of tidal marsh, and develop watershed management recommendations for supporting bayland sediment supply and creek health under a range of future climate scenarios in two major watersheds. SFEP is a partner on this grant and will support SFEI by planning and facilitating at least 4 workshops to support the activities described above.

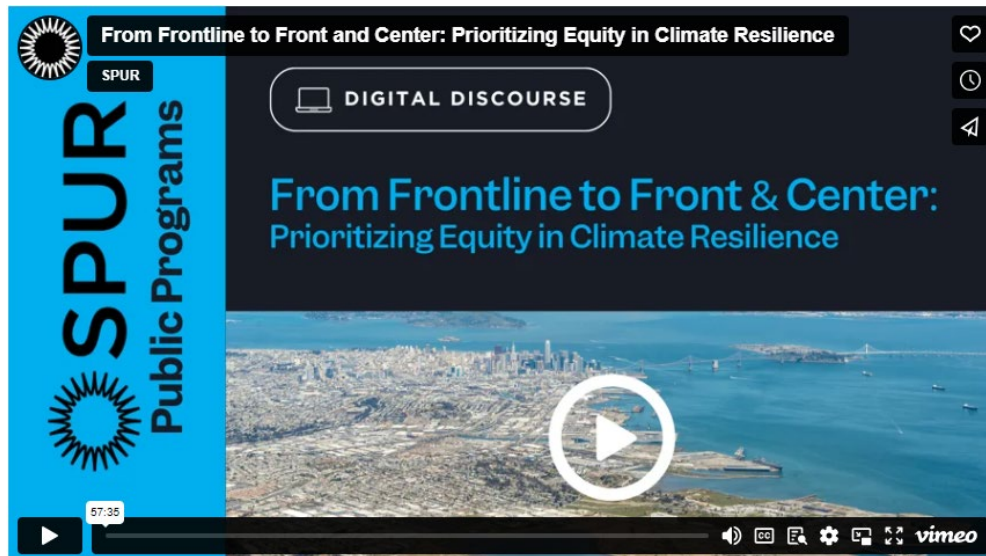
GSI By and For Communities - \$82,025 (SFEI/USEPA)

The San Francisco Estuary Institute was also awarded funding from the US EPA's 2022 San Francisco Bay Water Quality Improvement fund to manage Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI). The project is a collaboration between SFEI, SFEP, Urban Tilth, and UC Berkeley to engage communities in East Oakland and Richmond in GSI implementation by employing a community-driven GSI planning process to co-build community capacity to design, create, and manage GSI locally. As a subrecipient, SFEP will support community tours and community workshops and engagement activities, in addition to advising on GSI opportunities and plans.

COMMUNICATIONS

From Frontline to Front and Center: Prioritizing Equity in Climate Resilience

As part of SPUR's "Digital Discourse" series, SFEP staff Darcie Luce and Heidi Nutters helped plan and participated in a panel discussion on community resilience. The panel was moderated by Darcie, and in addition to Heidi included representatives from BCDC, HDR, the City of Alameda, and Nuestra Casa.



Panel Recording: [From Frontline to Front and Center: Prioritizing Equity in Climate Resilience on Vimeo](#)

Climate Summit for San Mateo County

At the October Climate Summit for San Mateo County (hosted by Climate Resilient Communities, Nuestra Casa, Rise South City, and Thrive Alliance), SFEP's Diana Fu spoke on a panel focused on Nature-Based Solutions for Climate Resilience. Recordings for the Summit will be available soon at: [Climate Summit 2023 — Thrive, The Alliance of Nonprofits for San Mateo County \(thrivealliance.org\)](#).

WRMP Fall 2023 Newsletter

The [WRMP Fall 2023 Newsletter](#) went out to nearly 380 interested parties. It included information about the WRMP's [early implementation priorities](#), as well as updates from the WRMP's People & Wetlands workgroup. The People & Wetlands workgroup recently defined the key benefits wetlands provide to people that the WRMP should monitor; these include shoreline protection,

water quality, public access, and opportunities for community stewardship, knowledge production & transmission, and cultural & spiritual experiences. In Summer 2023, the WRMP Steering Committee approved new and updated Management Questions developed and proposed by the People and Wetlands Workgroup:

- How are the benefits of wetlands [identified above] distributed regionally and among different demographic groups?
- How does the provision of benefits progress over time at existing and restored wetland sites?
- What monitoring data and/or analyses are needed to improve the relationships between tidal marsh restoration, fish and wildlife support, mosquito and vector control, and public access?

The People and Wetlands workgroup will continue to define indicators to quantify and monitor these benefits in Winter 2023.

Bay Nature Article on Nature-Based Solutions

Check out this article in Bay Nature on nature-based solutions, with quotes from SFEP's Heidi Nutters and Darcie Luce:

<https://baynature.org/article/now-we-are-asking-nature-to-solve-the-problems-we-created/>.





MEMO

DATE: November 7, 2023

TO: Implementation Committee

FROM: Darcie Luce, SFEP Staff

RE: Task 23-2 – Develop an indicator based on regionally meaningful metrics of trash in the Estuary and its watersheds for use in the State of the Estuary report

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The Blueprint Steering Committee met on October 5 to advance a process for Blueprint tasks that have been identified by staff as unlikely to make progress for the five-year duration of the 2022 Estuary Blueprint. The Blueprint task used as a case study for the meeting was **Task 23-2: Develop an indicator based on regionally meaningful metrics of trash in the Estuary and its watersheds for use in the State of the Estuary report** (from [Action 23: Reduce trash and marine debris in the Estuary](#)).

The overall goals of the meeting were to:

- 1) Respond to the staff assessment and recommendation.
- 2) If the task was determined by the Steering Committee to be intractable, create a plan to enable staff to discontinue tracking the task for now.
- 3) Ensure transparency for all interested partners and stakeholders.

Staff conducted interviews with Working Group Leads and State of the Estuary Report coordinators in preparation for the Steering Committee discussion. The Steering Committee concurred that the staff assessment of Task 23-2 was correct and recommended that staff cease actively tracking this task. The Steering Committee emphasized, however, that while the development of a trash tracking indicator for the State of the Estuary Report may not be currently feasible, there is a great deal of effort and expense being directed at trash reduction as indicated by the progress on Task 23-4. In addition, several efforts are underway to track specific types of trash in the San Francisco Estuary and throughout the state.

Task 23-2 Background: Development and History

Task 23-2 calls for the development of a trash reduction indicator for use in the State of the Estuary Report. The task is a revised version of a similar task in the 2016 Estuary Blueprint. The 2016 Blueprint task focused on a review of trash tracking metrics and methodologies to inform the development of a trash reduction indicator for the State of the Estuary Report.

In January 2021, SFEI released the California Trash Monitoring Methods and Assessments Playbook, which tested multiple trash monitoring methods with the goal of developing a library of methods with known levels of precision, accuracy, and cross-comparability of results. This playbook offered the possibility of

developing a region-wide trash monitoring system which could provide the longitudinal data for a trash indicator in the State of the Estuary Report.

The Blueprint Update Working Group identified this task as a priority to carry forward in the 2022 Estuary Blueprint. With the evolution in trash regulations and permit requirements in the Bay Area over the past few years, however, the development of a trash reduction indicator has become a much less feasible and exponentially more expensive task.

Task Background: Trash Monitoring Challenges and Current Status

Trash is notoriously difficult to monitor. It is highly variable by location, timing, and scale. For these reasons, scientifically robust and replicable trash monitoring can be very time-consuming, labor-intensive, and expensive. In addition—as with all monitoring—different goals can require very different methodologies.

A few efforts underway to track specific forms of trash include:

- Bay Area Municipal Stormwater (BAMS) Collaborative, the successor association to BASMAA, is conducting a multi-year study of stormwater outfalls to validate the effectiveness of its trash controls on reducing trash loading into receiving waters.
- California Tobacco Control Program: is conducting a project to track tobacco waste in neighborhoods throughout California, by dispatching monitors to sample locations throughout the state. This project will conclude in June 2024. A precursor white paper can be found here: https://merg.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Tobacco-Product-Waste-in-California_-A-White-Paper.pdf
- Ocean Protection Council is funding SFEI to develop a statewide plastic and microplastic (plastics) monitoring plan. This project began earlier this year and is set to complete in 2025: https://www.opc.ca.gov/webmaster/ftp/pdf/agenda_items/20230124/Item-7b-Statewide-Plastics-Monitoring-Network-508.pdf
- Coastal Cleanup Day is the largest citizen monitoring effort in the state, and collects trash data through the CleanSwell app.

Summary of Task Progress

Some progress has been made and continues to be made on systematically tracking trash in the Bay Area and in California; however, the development of an Estuary-wide trash tracking indicator faces substantial obstacles, including:

- The substantial expense associated with trash monitoring data collection
- Challenges funding and resourcing long-term database management
- Any monitoring method used would likely be highly contested due to multiple conflicting priorities
- The variability of trash will create challenges in data validity at the regional scale
- Concerns by the regulated community over data privacy and misuse.

Consequently, the development of a trash-tracking indicator has been characterized as a “non-starter” at this time, although with new resources, that assessment could change.

The Steering Committee identified the following next steps for Task 23-2.

Next Steps

- 1) Staff will stop actively tracking progress on Task 23-2 for now.
- 2) Staff will write up a summary of current efforts to track trash in the estuary and the state.
- 3) Staff will write up an assessment, with the help of Working Group Leads, of the resources needed to develop a trash tracking indicator in the State of the Estuary Report including the level of funding needed initially and on an ongoing basis and including opportunities for surrogate indicators like using the existing covered entities' data in aggregated form.
- 4) Staff will summarize the trash reduction efforts that are underway, including the amount of resources being spent on trash capture and reduction.
- 5) These summaries will be made available on the State of the Estuary Report online platform (currently under development) and to interested stakeholders and partners, as requested.

Conclusion

Regarding Task 23-2: the Blueprint Steering Committee and staff agreed that this task will be revisited in the next Blueprint update, as it remains a priority. Staff and Task Leads will remain alert to new developments.

Few Blueprint tasks are likely to be as challenging as Task 23-2; however, in the event of another “intractable” task, staff and the Steering Committee will use this case study as a model to develop a strategy for that task.