

BDAC ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION WORK GROUP
Meeting Summary
July 24, 1996

Ecosystem
Restoration
Workgroup

The fourth meeting of the BDAC Ecosystem Restoration Work Group was held on Wednesday, July 24, 1996 at the Resources Building from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 pm in room 1131.

BDAC Members of the Work Group:

Mary Selkirk	Lee Lehman	Tib Belza
Stu Pyle	Bob Raab	Roberta Borgonovo

Invited Participants:

Peter Rhoads	Gary Bobker	Pete Chadwick
Cindy Darling	Kate Hansel	Nat Bingham
Ron Fujita	Sally Shanks	Bruce Herbold

Other Participants:

Dave Fullerton	Greg Zlotnik	Lance Johnson
Greg Thomas	Jason Peltier	Glen Birdzell
John Winther	Heather McIntire	Tracy Clay
Marnie Kragan	Ron Spitz	Christian Wright
B.J. Miller	Dan Fults	Tim Ramiriz
Steve Hirsch	Bill Gaines	Robert Clark
Steve Chainey	Phil Unger	Wayne Lifton
Dave Luscher	Gilbert Cosio	Tom Cannon

CALFED Staff:

Dick Daniel	Rick Soehren	Michelle Wong
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Mary Selkirk introduced the meeting and presented the agenda. She reiterated the goal of developing targets by early September. Agenda topics included restoration targets, meeting schedule, ecosystem restoration strategy, the approach to setting targets, and adaptive management strategies.

Ecosystem Restoration Strategy

Dick Daniel and Rick Soehren summarized aspects of the revised draft of the Ecosystem Restoration Strategy. The role of agriculture in the strategy for restoration was a major discussion topic. Concern was expressed that CALFED is overlooking the

ecological (wildlife) and economic value of agriculture. Concern was also expressed about the advisability of converting diked wetlands to tidal wetlands. The value of open water tidal habitat in Suisun Marsh was questioned. More emphasis on diked wetland preservation was suggested. The release of salts and minerals from diked lands in the Marsh if converted to tidal lands was a concern. Concern was expressed that too much emphasis was placed on floodplain habitat restoration and not enough on tide land restoration, because tidal habitat is of poorest health.

Other key points and questions raised included:

- The ecological and economic value of agricultural lands should be considered in the restoration program;
- Indicators and targets for the program need further development;
- Adaptive management should be a major focus of the program;
- Concern about conversion of diked wetlands that already serve a valuable ecosystem role;
- Present targets in the plan are placeholders - targets will be developed; and
- CALFED needs to provide more guidance on the vision and targets.

Targets

Dick Daniel presented various approaches to setting targets for CALFED actions. Four methods were discussed. Use of all four methods was suggested to see how members feel about target levels developed. Concern was expressed about the applicability of setting targets based on historical or predisturbance levels, since most of problems have surfaced in last several decades. A suggestion was made that targets would vary depending on ecological function, and that a more holistic approach based on functions be developed. Further suggestions involved setting targets for a set of indicators. Others were not concerned about initial targets, and that placeholders were fine for now. Some even felt that it may be too early to set definitive target levels. There was a question as to how CALFED might set targets for introduced species such as water hyacinth. There was concern about who would help in the development of targets. Dick stated that agencies have been lined up to help. Public comments focused on potential problems with setting targets based on historical levels, because much has changed over time. The suggestion was made to set a new target range based on realistic expectations. A focused workshop on targets will be held on September 18th. A paper on targets will be distributed in early September.

The following key points and questions were raised:

- Blend the various approaches (i.e. reference period, historical, or predisturbance) to setting targets;

- Develop targets and get feedback;
- Focus on ecological functions, as well as species and habitat;
- Technical teams will be assembled to develop targets. Concern about who would be involved with setting targets; and
- Concerns expressed about setting historical targets, because so much has changed.

Adaptive Management

Dick Daniel and Rick Soehren received comment on the draft Adaptive Management Paper. Mary Selkirk stated that the program needs input on the institutional applicability of the Adaptive Management Program. Comments were generally negative about the way Adaptive Management was proposed. More examples were suggested to better explain details of the approach. A member of the public reminded the group that the law and the regulatory community are not adaptive.

The following key points and questions were raised by the working group:

- The institutional requirements of adaptive management must be addressed;
- Further refinement of the CALFED approach to adaptive management is needed;
- Adaptive management has been ongoing for years;
- Category III could be test bed for adaptive management;
- Need case studies of adaptive management to better understand how it will be used in CALFED program;
- To accomplish adaptive management there will be a need for mediating institution; and
- Setting fixed targets may or may not be in conflict with adaptive management.

Public Presentations

B.J. Miller gave a short presentation and provided handouts on “Developing a basis for ecosystem restoration”. He stated that the critical environmental problem is declining fish populations over the past third of a century. He listed major changes that have occurred that may be associated with the declines, including expanded water projects, introduced species, increased fishery harvest, pesticides and toxins, destruction of habitat, hatchery operations, aquatic weed control, ocean conditions, and floods and droughts. He suggested a rigorous analysis of existing data to better determine which factors were important in the decline of the fish, before we go ahead and set targets.

Greg Thomas gave a short presentation on the goals of an ecosystem restoration program. He hopes to pry open the process to provide for a broader, more ambitious ecosystem restoration program. He would hope to restore ecosystem while managing

risks to water supply system. He invited the working group to bolder thinking and broader depth of restoration actions, stating that it would be easier to reduce the program later, than to add to it in midstream. The focus of the proposal submitted by NHI is on tidal wetland restoration, and maintaining levee system with some improvements and setbacks, and a long-term program to convert leveed lands to tidal wetlands. While recognizing the difficulty in restoring deeply subsided islands in the Delta, they felt that more emphasis is needed on recommending development of techniques for reducing subsidence. They are suggesting a long-term program of voluntary retirement of agricultural lands in the Delta. He suggested bringing in experts to assist in setting targets. He also supports large scale restoration and would like the opportunity to participate in the program.

In closing, Mary Selkirk stated that the Work Group would incorporate public feedback received during meeting on the restoration program. She summarized key suggestions such as a need to analyze factors in the decline of the fish populations, seismic risks to Delta levee system, and the suggestion for focused technical workshops to set targets. She emphasized that program was at a critical point in the process. The next meeting was scheduled for August 28th.