

SAVE SAN FRANCISCO BAY ASSOCIATION

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MEMORANDUM

To: Kate Hansel
From: Cynthia Koehler
Gary Bobker
Date: October 23, 1997
RE: Ecosystem Roundtable

The Ecosystem Roundtable has been up and running for a year and is about to make final recommendations on a first round of funding. While there is much about the process that is positive, we are concerned that the Roundtable has moved off of its original mission in several fundamental ways. We also believe that the process for developing a slate of actions for near-term spending on the ecosystem program could be substantially improved.

In our view, the Roundtable this year became bogged down in administrative issues regarding grant and contract management. In addition, it defined its job as administering a Request For Proposals process instead of the more productive function of developing broad buy-in for a spending program that cuts across various pots of available funding. Thus, instead of developing a focused work plan for near-term spending, the Roundtable developed a massive RFP program.

In light of the substantial federal and state funds that will be made available over the next few years, it is imperative that the process function effectively and ensure spending in a manner best suited to long-term restoration. We propose that the Roundtable process get back to first principles in three key areas.

First, it is a citizens advisory group and should not, indeed cannot, make spending decisions. The Roundtable is charged with making recommendations and as such should not be hamstrung by technical contracting and grant making requirements in its deliberations.

Second, the Roundtable's primary responsibility, or work product, should be to craft a work plan setting forth near-term environmental priorities and actions to attain them. This plan should serve as a blueprint for action and be composed of a mix of science and policy considerations (e.g., set aside x\$ for water acquisition, or prioritize fish passage projects on a,b,c tributaries). A series of focused RFPs should certainly be part of the mix in terms of obtaining program implementation. In addition, other means of implementing action items

should be identified and employed.

Third, the Roundtable should revisit the "virtual pool" concept. As you may recall, the original notion was that the Roundtable would assume a pot of available funds without considering the specific source, or legal or administrative constraints, for purposes of planning and making recommendations on spending priorities. Once agreement is reached on substantive policy recommendations, the technical issues of which pots of money are appropriate for spending on which parts of the work plan, and how such funds should be transferred or put out for bid or otherwise made available should be put back in the hands of the appropriate agencies, or some kind of agency/stakeholder sub-group. Contrary to expectations, the Roundtable did not serve as a coordinating function for various federal and state restoration efforts, but became another exercise in administering the Category III program.

A process that is transparent, credible and accountable is essential to ensuring that the funds rapidly becoming available are spent as wisely as possible. We look forward to working with you on this important issue.