

**California Wetland Monitoring Workgroup**  
**Report to California Water Quality Monitoring Council**  
**April 2, 2009**

**Mission of the California Wetland Monitoring Workgroup (CWMW)**

To improve the monitoring and assessment of wetland and riparian resources through development of a comprehensive wetland monitoring plan for California and increased coordination and cooperation among local, state, and federal agencies, tribes, as well as non-governmental organizations. The workgroup will strive to provide review of the technical and policy aspects of wetland monitoring tool development, implementation and use of data to improve wetland management in California.

**Participation in the CWMW**

There has been broad participation in the CWMW, with more than a dozen State and Federal agencies and non-governmental organizations typically being represented at each meeting. The meetings provide a forum for pursuing the common objectives of the participating agencies and allow for updates and information exchanges that improve overall communication and coordination between agencies. The last three meetings of the CWMW have been on November 10, 2008, January 13, 2009, and March 12, 2009.

**Recent Activities of the CWMW**

The CWMW is currently focused on two priority objectives: Initial development of a coordinated statewide wetland monitoring program and establishment of a wetlands data portal. Progress on each is discussed in more detail below:

State Wetlands Monitoring Program – A coordinated state monitoring program must be focused around answering questions about wetland extent and condition at both the ambient (i.e. overall) and project levels, but must be flexible enough to allow every participating agency and members of the public to use the data compiled to answer questions important to their objectives and mandates. *Individual agency needs will not be subsumed by the coordinated program, but rather supported by it.*

The CWMW agreed that the State program should consist of four components organized around USEPA's Level 1-2-3- monitoring framework. Various combinations of these components can be used to answer most wetland management questions:

1. Extent and distribution of wetlands, e.g. maps and inventories
2. Ambient condition of wetlands, e.g. overall wetland condition across various spatial and temporal scales
3. Location and assessments (when appropriate) of wetland projects and their effect on wetland extent and condition
4. Intensive monitoring data that provides deeper insight into wetland function and supports indicator development and refinement

Information compiled under these four components should be made available via the wetlands data portal, which will serve as a gateway for all agencies and the public (see discussion below).

The coordinated monitoring program will be developed by an existing Technical Advisory Team (TAT) that has been convened by the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) to

help develop the State Wetland and Riparian Protection Policy. The CWMW will oversee and direct the TAT's activities to develop the monitoring plan. Ultimately this plan will support the SWRCB's new policy (as well as that of other agencies). Similarly, other current activities of the TAT could support development of the monitoring program (e.g. a unified wetland definition, a consistent wetland classification system).

**Action Item:** Over the next several months, the TAT will produce a document that provides details of the coordinated plan and a strategy for phased development and implementation of the plan. These documents will be vetted through all partner agencies through the CWMW.

Wetlands Portal – The CWMW envisions the wetland portal to be a gateway for all users (e.g. agency staff and the public) to explore all available information on wetlands and to answer user defined questions. The essential components of a data portal include:

- Interactive search capabilities
- Multimedia tools to visualize information
- Ability to answer predefined questions via produced graphs and tables
- Ability to answer user defined questions
- Capability for users to upload data
- Capability to access data that is either housed within or accessible to the regional data centers
- Links to data residing in other locations
- Mechanism to share information with others (e.g. social networking for wetlands)

It is envisioned that the wetland portal will obtain much of its data from the Regional Data Centers being established to support the State's Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program (SWAMP). However, information available via the portal may be accessed from other sources in addition to the Regional Data Centers.

The CWMW discussed the fact that much of the data compiled by the Wetland Portal and many of the associated tools are not limited to wetlands, but apply to questions about the health of all aquatic ecosystems. Furthermore, many other aquatic ecosystems (e.g. lakes, streams) include wetland elements. *Therefore, the CWMW recommends that the California Water Quality Monitoring Council pursue an "Aquatic Health Portal", of which wetlands is one element. This would allow for more seamless sharing of information and tools across multiple habitat types.*

The ultimate vision for the "Aquatic Health Portal" is a long-term goal. In the short-term, the CWMW will focus on developing capacity to provide access to some priority data sets (e.g. information on wetland extent and distribution). The goal would be to have a functioning portal available within 12-18 months, and to continue to add capacity and adapt the portal over time based on user needs.

**Action Item:** An Information Technical Advisory Team (ITAT) will be formed to provide a forum for collaboration of IT staff on the portal development and to ensure that the functionality of the portal is guided by the needs of the partner agencies as directed by the CWMW.

The main constraint to continued progress on development of the monitoring plan and the portal is funding. Anticipated funding from the SWRCB has been affected by the State bond

freeze. Limited funds are still available from the existing SWRCB contract for the TAT and from the Coastal Impact Assistance Program (CIAP) monies (which should be available later this year). However, the CWMW recommends that a more detailed budget be developed for full development and implementation of these programs.