

California Estuary Monitoring Workgroup CHARTER

Mission

Under the guidance of the California Water Quality Monitoring Council, the California Estuary Monitoring Workgroup (CEMW) will evaluate existing estuarine resource monitoring, assessment and reporting efforts and work to enhance those efforts so as to improve the delivery of water quality and ecosystem health information to the user, in the form of the California Estuaries Portal. The CEMW will endeavor to improve the monitoring, assessment, and reporting of estuarine resources by increasing cooperation, coordination, and collaboration among local, state, and federal agencies, tribes, and non-governmental organizations involved in the monitoring of water quality and ecosystem health of California's estuaries. The CEMW will review technical and policy aspects of estuarine resource monitoring, tool development, implementation and use of data to improve estuarine resource management in California.

Need for the CEMW

The San Francisco Bay-Delta is the state's largest and most important estuary. Many state, federal and local agencies, regulated dischargers, and water bond grant recipients spend millions of dollars each year monitoring, assessing and reporting on the condition of the San Francisco Bay-Delta estuary ecosystem. While some coordination efforts currently exist—including the Interagency Ecological Program (IEP, since 1970), the San Francisco Bay Regional Monitoring Program (Bay RMP, since 1993) and an emerging Delta RMP—there is currently no overall structure to coordinate all of these activities nor a universally agreed upon way to integrate the data and information gained from these activities into a coherent ecosystem health assessment. At present, the specific mandates of each agency/organization result in inconsistent monitoring objectives and methods to collect, assess, and manage the data, making it difficult to integrate data from different studies and sources. What is more, there is no single user-friendly place to access the data.

Membership and Representation

CEMW membership is open to representatives of local, state and federal agencies with authority or responsibility for regulation, protection, or management of California's estuarine resources. Non-governmental organizations and other not-for-profit organizations that possess key estuarine water quality and/or ecosystem-related data sets or that are active in estuary assessment, restoration, and management programs are encouraged to participate.

Meetings will be open, informal and consensus driven.

Scope and Objectives

To focus the CEMW's efforts to coordinate, integrate and enhance California's estuarine resource monitoring, assessment and reporting efforts, the workgroup will develop an internet portal that delivers intuitive, streamlined access to estuary ecosystem health information that directly addresses users' questions. Users of this information include:

- a) Agency decision makers
- b) Agency staff performing assessments, evaluating conservation investments, writing permits, developing local land and water use plans and ordinances, taking enforcement, etc.
- c) Legislature
- d) Water quality and ecosystem management scientists and practitioners
- e) Non-governmental organizations (e.g., Heal the Bay, Waterkeepers, SCCWRP, SFEI, citizen monitoring groups)

- f) Regulated community
- g) Public

As a portal is developed, maintained and enhanced, the CEMW will strive to concurrently enhance the associated monitoring and assessment efforts that underlie the portal. This may include coordinating monitoring and assessment activities, discovering and breaking down existing barriers to information sharing, and enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of monitoring, assessment, and reporting for the estuary health theme. The CEMW will seek to achieve the level of standardization necessary to meet the needs of the information users, including agency decision makers, legislators, and the public.

While maintaining a statewide perspective, the CEMW will focus its initial efforts on the San Francisco Bay-Delta estuary.

Program Review

The CEMW will review existing assessments and their underlying estuarine resource monitoring programs, provide critical review and comment (e.g., biases, data gaps, redundancies, comparability issues) based on the performance measures developed by the Monitoring Council, and encourage improvement over time.

- a) Are existing monitoring and assessment programs able to adequately address key public and resource management questions?
 - What do we do well?
 - What is not being addressed?
- b) What needs to be done to correct the problems or improve performance?

A detailed critique will be sent to the Monitoring Council with recommendations for agencies/organizations responsible for the assessments. The performance measures provided in the December 2008 Monitoring Council recommendations report (see Section 2.1.2 and Appendix 3) will be used to structure the evaluations.

A key component of coordination involves the thresholds used to assess collected monitoring data and to answer relevant questions on a variety of spatial and temporal scales.

- a) Have commonly accepted metrics and thresholds been developed, if not why, and what can be done to establish them?
- b) What are the pros and cons of existing published thresholds?
- c) What statutory and regulatory requirements must be met in the selection of existing and future thresholds?

The Workgroup will develop recommendations to the Monitoring Council for making assessment thresholds more uniform across agencies and organizations involved in estuary monitoring. Recommendations will reflect the requirements of adopted statutory and regulatory mandates and consider regulations under development by potentially affected agencies.

Outreach

Sustainability hinges on getting the California Estuaries Portal woven into the fabric of each participating agency's programs. As such, the CEMW will market their portal development and coordination efforts to partner agencies, with the goals of improving participation, sharing data, making linkages between agency web sites, and using the portal as part of each agency's program implementation, stressing how each organization benefits from the effort. Fostering these relationships is an important goal of the CEMW.