

**Enhancing Regional Monitoring in California: New Initiatives
Conference Call Notes
Thursday January 22, 2009 – 1 p.m. - 3 p.m.**

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Notes coordinator: Carolyn Yale, U.S. EPA

Participants:

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Steven Steinberg (Humboldt SU) (Klamath)

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1. Introductions and Agenda Review (Ziegler)

The purpose of the call is to coordinate the emerging regional efforts (Sacramento River Watershed, Delta, San Joaquin River Basin, Klamath Basin and Central Coast) and help build them into a statewide framework. Some of the call participants attended a regional monitoring conference sponsored by EPA several years ago, and this call renews the dialog. EPA provides funds to three of the efforts (Klamath, Central Coast, and San Joaquin), and has funded the Sacramento program in the past.

At the Monitoring Council's next meeting, February 2, there is time scheduled to discuss coordinating regional efforts with the Monitoring Council's work. Carolyn Yale will attend the meeting and convey the results from this conference call to the MC. **(Note: The regions' suggestions to the Council appear on p. 5)**

2. Sacramento River Watershed Program (McCord)

The Sacramento River Watershed Monitoring Program started approximately 15 years ago and has been supported by grants, particularly from EPA. Currently some targeted funding comes from the Sacramento Regional County Sanitation District to determine the viability of establishing a 'regional monitoring program' run by stakeholders with sustainable (non-grant) funding. Key issues and challenges are the size of the watershed (27,000 square miles) and its diverse population—sparse overall, but also including the Sacramento region, which has its own "Coordinated Monitoring Program" and overlaps with the Delta region. Given relatively good water quality, there are no broad public concerns on this issue.

A draft document, the Sacramento River Watershed Regional Monitoring Program Investigation Report, is now posted for comments through February 2009 at: http://sacriver.org/documents/2008/SRWP_RMP_Investigation_Report_PublicReviewDraft.pdf. A final report is due in June 2009. Over the next two years, the Program will focus on characterizing a regional monitoring program and getting key stakeholders to 'sign on' to the concept.

Q/A Discussion: Future funding is an issue. It would be desirable to reach beyond the 'regulated community' such as NPDES dischargers to find supporters of a program who might help fund a coordinating entity. Also, they are considering whether the new entity would participate in monitoring, or merely coordinate others' efforts, or both.

3. Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta RMP (Ballard)

Development and implementation of a regional monitoring program (RMP) for the Delta is an action identified in the Strategic Workplan for Activities in the San Francisco Bay/Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Estuary (adopted in 2008 by the State Water Board, and Central Valley and San Francisco Regional Water Boards). . Development of the Delta RMP is expected to proceed in a phased approach. The first phase will focus on mechanisms for regularly compiling, assessing, and reporting water quality data from existing, on-going efforts. The goal is to complete this phase with a visible, tangible product such as a "Pulse of the Delta" type of synthesis report. The second phase is expected to define and implement the long-term structure and goals of a Delta RMP that is fully integrated and coordinated among all programs. The intent is to present options and associated resource needs for the short-term assessment and reporting framework and long-term Delta RMP for the Water Boards' consideration by December 2009.

The Delta RMP planning effort is supported by Regional and State Water Board staffing and contracts with the Aquatic Science Center (SFEI), Dr. Brock Bernstein, and UC Davis researchers. A stakeholder kick-off meeting was held in September 2008, to begin a process designed to foster stakeholder participation in the development of the Delta RMP. One outcome of this meeting was the formation of stakeholder working groups to plan various aspects of the RMP framework including governance, monitoring questions, data integration, funding, and coordination among other programs. Other supporting efforts that are in progress include a contaminants synthesis report being prepared by UC Davis researchers, and a report and on-line directory summarizing existing water quality monitoring in the Delta that the Aquatic Science Center is preparing.

Additional information regarding Delta RMP planning effort is available at: http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/water_issues/delta_water_quality/comprehensive_monitoring_program/index.shtml.

4. Central Coast Project (Conley and Hoover)

The Central Coast Water Quality Data Synthesis, Assessment, and Management (SAM) Project has been underway for two years and is focused on bringing data together from 14 monitoring program sources to address region-wide issues. Providing information and

database tools relevant to management decision-making is one of the goals. The project benefitted from a very committed advisory committee with statewide experience.

A recently released strategic plan addresses water quality data integration and access, coordination of monitoring, data analysis and reporting, and tracking land use management and improvements (land use-related data collection). (For information on the Project and download of the strategic plan see:

http://www.ccamp.net/sam/index.php/Main_Page.)

Q/A Discussion: The Project has leveraged EPA funds to get involvement of others. However, longer term (post 2009) funding is an issue; hopefully the work plan and technical tools available will attract supporters. As to approach to ‘integration’ and ‘coordination’’: The Central Coast is opportunistic (in contrast to top-down or highly structured). But in the process data standardization is challenging.

5. Klamath Basin (Steinberg)

The Klamath Basin work, which started a little over a year ago, has unique complexity because of the range of participants (tribes, federal, state, local agencies) and the fact that the basin spans Oregon and California. An objective is to develop a monitoring plan that focuses on significant impairments that will be addressed through TMDLs.

Outreach is important but difficult, in part due to the dispersed population. Main issues facing the project are: setting up a ‘governance’ structure for oversight and decision-making; coordination of data management; and technical aspects of data sharing. A meeting in March will take up the topic of sustainability of a monitoring program.

Q/A Discussion: Getting participants to agree on standards (for data) is an issue, as it can require changes in practices by data providers. Assistance (tools) to encourage moving data into SWAMP would be helpful.

Another initiative relating to Klamath regional monitoring - a proposed North Coast Science Center – is also in the works and apparently not yet in touch with the Klamath Basin project or Steve Steinberg.

- Terry Fleming will provide Steve Steinberg with contact information about the North Coast Science Center.

6. San Joaquin River Watershed (Yale and Jabusch)

A cooperative agreement between EPA and SFEI (with the Great Valley Center and Brock Bernstein), supports development of a strategy to coordinate and improve water quality monitoring and assessment in the San Joaquin basin. The approach builds on existing activities and accommodates the decentralized character of monitoring in the Basin. Priority topics, based on stakeholder input, include providing information on monitoring activities, standardization, data analysis and interpretation, development of a regional data center, and implementation options (funding, institutional support).

A prototype directory of regional monitoring activities has been developed and under direction of the Central Valley Regional Board is being incorporated into a region-wide directory. The pilot directory can be accessed online at

<http://www.sanjoaquinmonitoring.org/index.html>.

A draft Strategy Report with recommendations on the five topics will be vetted in the coming months, and the final Report will be completed this calendar year.

Q/A Discussion: There is broad interest in a directory-type tool that can display geographically-based information about monitoring efforts, and several regions or programs have or are developing something along these lines. Coordination in design and solutions for efficient maintenance are of general concern. Wetland Tracker was offered as an example for dealing with maintenance and updates.

7. California Water Quality Monitoring Council (MC) (Marshack)

In advance of the conference call Jon Marshack had provided a powerpoint document on the origin and mission of the Council, and on key recommendations recently adopted by the Monitoring Council in its Report. By the end of 2009 the Council is set to report out recommendations for a statewide monitoring strategy. The conference call focused on planned activities of potential interest and benefit to the regions. For instance, in the context of developing theme-based web portals, there will be work on tools and methods for monitoring, assessment, and data management; and standardization. Theme-based work groups will build out four pilot thematic web portals that will act as test cases for development of future portals. Another priority is building out existing regional data centers (Moss Landing, SFEI, UC Davis, and SCCWRP) and CEDEN (California Environmental Data Exchange Network).

Regarding the February 2 MC meeting in Costa Mesa, California. Details are available online at:

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/monitoring_council/index.shtml#meeting. A conference line will be available.

Q/A discussion: Q - Is funding available through the MC for regional efforts? A- There is funding for SWAMP, which coordinates regional monitoring efforts. \$4 million was allocated (over 3 years) for getting grants monitoring data into the regional data centers/CEDEN. However, this money is currently frozen, due to the state budget crisis. This effort will provide processes, facilities and tools that would also be useful to other data generators.

For further information on the centers and how regional monitoring program data might fit, the contact is Karl Jacobs at the State Water Board (916-341-5545 or kjacobs@waterboards.ca.gov).

An online web portal prototype mainly focusing on the Safe to Swim theme may be viewed at <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/monitoringcouncil/>, with the user name "cwqmc" and password "council".

8. Wrap-up Discussion and Next Steps

Discussion: Among the recurring issues for regional monitoring efforts are access to data, standardizing and integrating diverse monitoring data, locating sources of longer-term funding, and generally desire to share experience.

Message to the Monitoring Council:

Four requests have been flagged:

1. Explicit recognition by the Council of ‘regional monitoring programs’ would be appreciated as a step in working together. Collaboration should provide mutual benefits.
 - Establishment of a sub-committee on regional monitoring programs could help coordination between the Monitoring Council and the regions on activities suggested below (#’s 2-4).
 - The next version of the “Preliminary Statewide Inventory of Monitoring Programs “(12/03/08) could be broadened beyond agency-led efforts.

2. The MC could help regional efforts through ‘tech transfer’—for instance, developing tools to standardize, report and access data and providing training in use of these tools. . For example, the Council might consider providing ‘tech transfer’ training in a one-day session, potentially in Spring 2009 in conjunction with a workshop on indicator frameworks.

3. There is substantial regional interest in participating in development of regional data centers.

4. Improved lines of communication between the MC and regional programs are needed. To start, the Council’s web site could include links to such programs, perhaps distinguishing between “existing” programs such as SCCWRP and new initiatives “under development.”