Attendance: See attached

Announcements

Eric Cartwright (ACWD) distributed a handout, Alameda Creek Fish Passage Facilities (attached). He summarized progress on developing screens and other modifications to ACWD facilities and operations to date. Eric notes that a new gravity-driven pipeline is scheduled for construction in summer 2013. The BART weir project is in the permitting process and the design is undergoing a "constructability" review. He said that DFG's George Neillands is filling in for Krissy Atkinson, who recently moved to another position.

Carl Morrison announced that the issuance of National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) Recovery Plan for Central Coast steelhead has been delayed due in part to discussions about appropriate methodology.

IRWMP/Grant Funding Update

Carl Morrison told the group that the Integrated Regional Water Management Plan (IRWMP) is being updated. It will be completed next year and adopted. The program managers are selecting projects for "2nd round" funding currently. Proposals are due March 29. The group agreed that Alameda County Public Works Agency should be approached about submitting passage or other projects to IRWMP.

Chronology of the Alameda Creek Fisheries Restoration Workgroup

Gordon Becker reviewed the "Chronology" that CEMAR prepared for the Workgroup. A draft was distributed electronically and comments were requested by January 10, 2013. Tim Ramirez mentioned that the Chronology's applications will evolve, and likely will involve a "spin off" bullet point list of steelhead restoration related projects that can be provided to potential funders.

SFPUC Activities and Calaveras Dam Replacement Project

Tim Ramirez reviewed the PUC's activities and said that Watershed Environmental Improvement Program (WEIP) includes an Alameda Creek section that is posted on the commission's website. The WEIP includes land purchases in the areas tributary to the PUC's Alameda Creek watershed reservoirs.
Tim noted that the Sunol Valley Restoration Plan is being developed through funding by the SFPUC's lessee. The plan characterizes biota, and physical features and processes in the valley. He also said that Alameda County certified the environmental review document for the lease. Tim suggested that a Sunol Valley group "roundup" occur to discuss the plan and Sunol Valley related activities more in detail. This may happen in association with the next Workgroup meeting.

David Thomas told the group that PG&E is expecting to construct its project at the gasline crossing in 2014. Ellen Natesan noted that the restoration plan is scheduled for release in the spring, and that sections already are available for review at the request of Workgroup members.

The PUC has negotiated the scope of work for a steelhead genetics study with NMFS and has submitted some tissue samples for analysis. Study results are expected in a year, but preliminary findings should be described earlier. The report will characterize population structure at the watershed level and estimate the effective breeding population size.

The PUC likely will install a streamflow gauge on San Antonio Creek upstream from the reservoir. This may occur in association with the bridge replacement expected this summer at Geary Road.

Julie Labonte gave a presentation on the PUC's Water System Improvement Project (WSIP), including a status update and additional focus on the Calaveras Dam Replacement Project (CDRP). She also noted that work on the filters was recently completed at the Sunol Valley Water Treatment Plant.

Julie explained that the construction team found unexpected conditions on Observation Hill, adjacent to the dam site. The team stopped work and made additional borings and trenches to characterize the subsurface materials. They discovered an ancient landslide and other features that are leading to changes in the design from the form it had in the contract document. The process is generating additional excavation materials, and the PUC is seeking to minimize the impacts of disposal. Cost increases of some $133 million have accrued from the changes, but the conditions of the related NMFS permit are not affected. The CDRP is 30 percent complete, with completion scheduled in 2018.

Tim said that the trigger for fish flow releases is the availability downstream passage. We should expect a period when Calaveras releases will not be available through the outlet works. Fish screens and fish ladder installation are anticipated at the Alameda Creek Diversion Dam by 2015.
Stonybrook Creek

Gordon described the pool inventory in Stonybrook Canyon that CEMAR conducted on behalf of the Alameda County Resource Conservation District. The essential finding was that the amount of perennial pool habitat available upstream from passage barriers in the canyon is only about one half of that available in the lower canyon. Scale analysis of rainbow trout sampled in the lower canyon indicates that growth rates may be higher than expected for type of creek. Finally, the group discussed future priorities for passage in Stonybrook Creek.

Monitoring Subcommittee Introduction

Thomas Niesar noted the parties participating in the new subcommittee. A phone call between the members and George Neillands had been held the previous week. Thomas said that the resource agencies and Workgroup members have the goal of coordinating and sharing data from monitoring. The subcommittee is expected to act as liaison to hiring subconsultants as needed in the future. Scott Chenue said that the formation of the group is timely, as the SFPUC is conducting monitoring related to the CDRP Biological Opinion this winter.

Zone 7 also is conducting habitat related studies in association with its application for a water right extension. Tim mentioned that Arroyo de la Laguna data would help extend the range of existing hydrology models.

The subcommittee also intends to coordinate investigations in Niles Canyon. Thomas asked for input from Workgroup members.

South Bay Salt Ponds Restoration Project

John Bourgeois from the Coastal Conservancy presented on the South Bay Salt Pond Restoration Project (see attached). He said that Southern Eden Landing, immediately to the north of the Flood Control Channel (FCC), is the next focus area.

John said that the Project goal is to make 50 to 90 percent of the acquired areas restored. Phase 1 elements were located north of Old Alameda Creek in the Eden Landing area and included intensively managed ponds. These projects are being carried out to answer questions relating to species use and salinity levels.

John explained that the area between Eden Landing and Alameda Creek is scheduled to be converted to tidal marsh in Phase 2. The approach will involve small channels connected via sloughs rather than direct connection to the Bay, as bayside levees and shoreline areas are subject to large erosive forces.
The restoration will involve establishing an inland levee for flood protection. John noted a tradeoff between inboard levee placement offering stability and outboard placement offering greater flood storage. The current plan is to widen and raise the outboard levee.

John said the ACFCWCD wants to maintain the northern FCC levee due to flooding concerns. The levee may include a breach at the "J" Ponds location.

The Workgroup discussed fish related criteria for the Bay Ponds restoration area. It was noted that Alameda County has to submit a flood control plan to the Federal Emergency Management Agency at the end of next year, after which environmental review would be performed. The next step is to raise funding for construction.

John told the Workgroup that Jim Hobbs and a graduate student are monitoring fish in relation to the South Bay Salt Ponds projects. He also invited Workgroup members to provide input into design considerations.

Other updates, etc.

The existing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has a small amount of funding remaining, including some support for monitoring and modeling. The SFPUC, ACWD and Zone 7 plan to discuss an MOU and scope of work for the future shortly, as the existing MOU expires in November. Brenda Buxton noted that the Conservancy may be able to provide support.

March 14, 2013 is the next scheduled Workgroup meeting. The location is to be determined and will be announced in advance of the meeting.