Alameda Creek Fisheries Work Group
Flows Subcommittee

October 8, 2008 1:30 PM – 3:30 PM

Teleconference

Meeting Summary

Attending:

Andy Gunther, Center for Ecosystem Management and Restoration
Brenda Buxton, Coastal Conservancy
Manny DaCosta, Alameda County Flood Control
Jeff Miller, Alameda Creek Alliance
Elke Rank, Zone 7 Water Agency
Tim Ramirez, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC)
Scott Chenue (SFPUC)
Amod Dhakal (SFPUC)
Brian Sak (SFPUC)
Thomas Niesar, Alameda County Water District (ACWD)
Eric Cartwright, ACWD
Curtis Steitz Pacific Gas & Electric Company
Gary Stern, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)
Josh Fuller, NMFS
Wes Stokes, California Department of Fish and Game (DFG)
Krissy Atkinson, DFG
Marcia Grefsrud, DFG
Pete Alexander, (EBRPD)
Chuck Hanson, Hanson Environmental
Bill Trush, McBain & Trush
Darren Mireau, McBain & Trush
Scott McBain, McBain & Trush

1. Project Managers Report

Eric reported that Andy would be calling in late. Eric also commended McBain and Trush for their effort in completing the draft Sampling and Analysis Plan on schedule, and under budget.

2. Announcements

None

3. Update on Alameda Creek water quality event

Eric provided a brief overview of the Alameda Creek fish kill at the impoundment behind ACWD's rubber dam no. 3 (RD3) and follow-up. Eric reported that a potential cause of the fish kill may have been from a series of events including the natural daily cycle of dissolved oxygen reduction during nighttime (due to algae in the impoundment) combined with other that factors that may have included: arrival of stormwater runoff on Saturday that may have replaced the healthy water in the pond with water with a lower dissolved oxygen content and limited light in the pond due to the water's dark color and suspended sediment (which would have reduced photosynthetic activity and replacement of oxygen during the daytime); and addition of nutrients and decaying materials from stormwater runoff and/or discharges in the watershed that could have produced an additional oxygen demand on the system. ACWD has retained a panel of experts to evaluate the incident and the investigation is on-going.

4. Draft Sampling Analysis Plan
   a. Review draft Plan and receive comments

The Subcommittee discussed the draft Sampling and Analysis Plan (SAP) in depth.

Krissy reviewed questions she had shared earlier with subcommittee on the SAP:

Krissy recommended that the SAP add more context to show what specific sampling is proposed to occur in 2009 and the big picture of what will be studied and what is being considered to be steelhead habitat. Specifically, she said that she was concerned that the SAP only discusses sampling in Upper Alameda Creek with no additional text that discusses that potential steelhead habitat that exists elsewhere in the watershed. Krissy reminded the group that the original assessment from 2000 Upper Alameda Creek; Niles Canyon and its tributaries; and the Arroyo Mocho Canyon south of Livermore as the best potential spawning and rearing habitat. She stated that her vision of steelhead restoration in the Alameda Creek watershed is to restore this metapopulation and that upper Alameda Creek is an important part of this, as is Niles Canyon (and its tributaries) and Arroyo Mocho. Particularly, she wants flow studies to be conducted in Niles Canyon since this reach has been deemed important for Steelhead spawning / rearing and this area is affected by releases from Calaveras (and San Antonio Reservoir) Reservoir. Bill Trush responded to Krissy, stating that he first wants to get the sampling right in Upper Alameda Creek then he plans to analyze flows in Niles Canyon in year 2010 Regarding a question on macroinvertebrates, Bill indicated that the NGD analyses will include riffle habitat and temperature, which will be integrated with

macroinvertebrate availability. Krissy noted that in reference to steelhead, the optimum water temperature for a reach is dependent on habitat as well as on the abundance and availability of aquatic invertebrates (fish food). Therefore, it is important for the group to not focus on developing one temperature for the entire watershed but rather consider fish physiology and reach productivity. For example: In reaches that have low productivity, relatively low temperatures are optimum. In reaches with high productivity, relatively warmer temperatures (and fast water over riffles and runs) are optimum. She indicated the goal is to look at habitat productivity, not just survival, for steelhead. Krissy also added that water temperature be such that maximizes the productivity of other target species (FYLF, RLF, and WPT) and that these species be included in this study.

Regarding a statement on the Sunol Mainstem Study Reach and historical habitat suitability, Bill indicated that the statement was not necessary for the SAP and it can be removed.

Krissy stated her concerns with the document text that describes a "sharp decline in base flows" beginning downstream of the Sunol Water Treatment Plant. She recommended that more context be added to this statement about water loss, and asked the SFPUC where they stood in construction of cut-off walls to mitigate this water loss from the stream. Tim Ramirez stated that cut-off walls are now a SFPUC lease requirement and he added that construction to install the walls could begin as early as year 2010. Krissy recommended that discussion on cut-off walls be added to the Sampling Plan to ensure that there was no confusion about how much water is being lost from the stream at this reach.

Regarding a question on passage for smolt outmigration through the Sunol Valley, Tim noted existing passage analyses have been conducted in the Sunol Valley, and suggested that the SAP make clear it would not replicate these studies.

Jeff questioned not having a reservoir temperature model. It was noted that the first steps with temperature will be to use estimates of current and past temperatures to develop boundary conditions for modeling temperature. It was suggested that the reservoir temperature model will be valuable in the future as it will be used to model reservoir releases, but it doesn't need to be in place right now to implement the SAP.

Manny questioned why two USGS gages were not included in the SAP (Arroyo Hondo and Alameda Creek d/s of San Antonio). Scott indicated that data from these gages will be important for the evaluation of impaired and unimpaired flows and they will be included in the final SAP.

Krissy recommended that text be added that states that adequate flows are needed for smolt out-migration (passage) because this is often a limiting factor for steelhead in Central California streams. She acknowledged that Bill Trush had previously indicated that this would be included in the study.

Eric requested that the process of the workshops and their results be documented briefly in the SAP. He asked about when the project would need to start to meet the schedule in the SAP, which has task 1 being completed in December 2008. Scott indicated that this schedule assumed a start date for project in early November.

Subcommittee members were given until 10/31 to provide any final comments. Scott and Bill indicated that assuming any final comments were minor, they could finalize the SAP by Friday, November 7.

Gary Stern noted a recent study that was conducted by Jeff Hagar/Tom Paine & Associates regarding the relationship of flow and spawning habitat in Alameda Creek. This study was cited in the Final PEIR, but has not yet been publicly released. Many of the Work Group members were very interested in seeing this document.

Tim stated this work was completed recently as part of the Calaveras Dam project (it was not done by the Natural Resources Division at the SFPUC or to support the HCP). He said that they are trying to get the report finalized and will deliver it to the Subcommittee as soon as possible. He does not think the report will have a major influence on the work of the flows subcommittee.

b. Phase 2 funding status

Funding group held teleconference 10/28. No decisions yet. Funding discussions are ongoing. At present, it looks like there is a $150,000 shortfall.

Andy noted that Vulcan Materials was recently fined $190,000 by the Regional Water Quality Control Board for discharge of sediment-laden water into Arroyo de la Laguna (the press release describing this action is attached). Andy noted that it might be possible to have some of these fine monies directed to the flows study on Alameda Creek. He will work with Zone 7 to make initial inquiries with the Water Board and Vulcan Materials to see if this might be possible.

c. Next steps for implementing plan

Funding agencies will continue their discussions while the SAP is finalized. The plan is to approve the SAP via email, and no new meeting of the Subcommittee was scheduled.

San Francisco Bay
Regional Water Quality Control Board

October 27, 2008
For Immediate Release

San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board staff
Recommends $190,000 Fine against Quarry Operator

Contact: Dyan Whyte-Assistant Executive Officer
(510) 622-2441

Oakland—A Pleasanton quarry operator faces a potential $190,000 fine for releasing thousands of gallons of sediment laden water into a major Bay Area creek. Staff of the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) is recommending the penalty against Vulcan Materials Company, owner of the Pleasanton Asphalt, Sand and Gravel Facility (quarry).

High amounts of sediment can block stream flows, suffocate fish and other aquatic life. The effects of sediments can build up over time. Sediments also discolor the water making it esthetically unpleasant.

The Regional Water Board's action is intended to drive home the message that it's cheaper to comply than to violate. The complaint states the sediment-laden water from the quarry was released into Arroyo Mocho and flowed into Alameda Creek. The water is used for washing sand and gravel after it is mined, and is then pumped into a settling pond. Vulcan Materials Company is responsible for properly monitoring sediment levels in its settling pond. The complaint states that the Company failed to do so.

The Regional Water Board complaint states the quarry dumped approximately 48,000 gallons of sediment laden water on April 29, 2007. A 1.5 mile stretch of Arryo Mocho was blanketed in over 500 cubic yards of sediment and a plume of sediment laden water was visible 6 to 8 miles downstream. A resident reported that "the water looked like café au lait". Dead fish were also reported. The Regional Water Board is aware of two similar discharges earlier the same month.

Vulcan Materials Company responded fairly quickly after they became

aware of the spill and spent approximately $675,000 vacuuming up sediment from the bottom of the creek. This cost does not compensate for damages to the environment resulting from the discharge.

A hearing on this matter will be held in this matter at 9 a.m., January 14, 2009, at the Regional Water Board headquarters in Oakland. Vulcan Materials Company can waive that hearing and pay the recommended fine, up to $95,000 of which may be offset by a Supplementary Environmental Project approved by the Assistant Executive Officer.

The San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board's mission is to preserve, enhance and restore California's water resources and ensure their proper allocation and efficient use for the benefit of present and future generations.

State Water Resources Control Board
Office of Public Affairs
Phone: 916.341.5254
Fax: 916.341.5252
Email: info@waterboards.ca.gov