Alameda Creek Fisheries Work Group
Flows Subcommittee

May 16, 2008 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM

5th Floor Conference Room
San Francisco Public Utilities Commission
San Francisco, CA

Meeting Summary

Attending:

Brenda Buxton, Coastal Conservancy
Andy Gunther, Center for Ecosystem Management and Restoration
Elke Rank, Zone 7 Water Agency
Tim Ramirez, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC)
Thomas Niesar, Alameda County Water District (ACWD)
Eric Cartwright, ACWD
Pete Alexander, East Bay Regional Park District
Stuart Moock, representing Pacific Gas & Electric Company
Manny da Costa, Alameda County Flood Control District
Scott Chenue, SFPUC
Gary Stern, National Marine Fisheries Service
Josh Fuller, National Marine Fisheries Service
Chuck Hanson, Hanson Environmental, representing ACWD
Sarah Kupferberg, Questa Engineering
Steven Bobzien, East Bay Regional Park District
Ellen Natesan, SFPUC
George Neillands, California Department of Fish and Game
Krissy Atkinson, California Department of Fish and Game
David Houts, Zone 7 Water Agency (via speakerphone)

Announcements, review agenda

At the request of Gary Stern, the agenda was revised to condense the discussion of updates and the SFPUC flow/habitat study so that the discussion of the draft scope of work would begin no later than 10:00 AM.

Updates

Pete Alexander reported that hundreds of *O. mykiss* fry appeared on April 28th in Stonybrook Creek at the site where steelhead spawning behavior was observed on March 1st. The large number of fry, and the timing of their appearance, are consistent with the

interpretation that these fry are the result of the spawning of the adult steelhead that were moved upstream. The adults are still alive and holding in Stonybrook Creek. Pete reported that the radio tag has come off the male and appears to be coming of the female as well, so tracking these fish is likely to become more difficult in the future.

Eric reported that on May 15th the ACWD Board approved the hiring of an engineering team led by Winzler & Kelly to prepare the preliminary design for the fishway at the BART Weir/middle inflatable dam. The scope of work also includes preliminary design for the ladder at the upper inflatable dam and screens on the remaining unscreened diversions in the channel. The ACWD Board also approved a contract amendment for McBain & Trush to support Bill Trush's continued efforts with the Subcommittee.

Manny noted that about 50 people attended the first Alameda Creek sediment forum on April 23. The purpose of this meeting was to let all interested parties know what work was being done with regards to sediment in the watershed, and to provide an opportunity to coordinate efforts. The next meeting of the forum will be in October.

Tim indicated that the SFPUC is planning to hold a scoping session regarding the Alameda Creek Habitat Conservation Plan in the fall of 2008, with the plan being completed in 2010. He indicated that the habitat/flow work presently being conducted in Alameda Creek below Calaveras Dam is to populate the model that will be used in the HCP to estimate impacts and mitigation alternatives. He acknowledged that he would have preferred the Subcommittee to have more notice about the initiation of this study, but there was a need to release the water from Calaveras and SFPUC staff wanted to use this as an opportunity to gather data.

Scott Chenue reported that their 5-person team just completed eight days of surveys from the Arroyo de la Laguna confluence upstream to the base of the dam (about 10 miles). They have been learning how releases from the low-flow valve on Calaveras relate to actual flow in the Creek. The first surveys were done at a flow of 22 cfs, and the second round of surveys will begin on May 21 at 16 cfs.

Finally, Pete Alexander reported the initial results of electrofishing behind the ACWD inflatable dams. The found very few predatory fish, just one small large-mouthed bass and one pikeminnow.

Subcommittee Habitat Assessment Draft Scope of Work

Andy opened this discussion by introducing the origin of the draft scope of work. It was developed as requested at the last Subcommittee meeting from a conference call held among Bill Trush, Chuck Hanson, Brian Sak, and Chip McConnaha. Andy edited and distributed the draft to these experts for review, and after receiving no comments the draft was forwarded to Gary Stern and Josh Fuller for comments. Their comments, and those of DFG, were included along with the draft scope in the agenda packet for the meeting.

Sarah Kupferberg and Steve Bobzien provided the Subcommittee with an introduction to the ecology of the Foothill Yellow-Legged Frog (FYLF) and the California Red-Legged Frog (CRLF), and the implications of the proposed scope of work for these species. FYLF and CRLF breed in the spring in particular locations to which they demonstrate interannual fidelity. Steve noted that Alameda Creek has one of the most robust breeding populations of CRLF in the Bay Area, and there have been ongoing studies of populations in the Creek for many years including a key site at Camp Ohlone.

In general, successful frog reproduction requires relatively stable lower-flow conditions, and release of cooler waters will slow development. Pulse flows in the spring, as are currently underway, will wash out egg masses and tadpoles from breeding locations, damaging year-class strength. Sarah noted that natural hydrographs, which include spring storm events, can maintain robust amphibian populations, particularly with diverse channel morphology (she noted successful FYLF breeding on the south fork of the Eel over a range of 1-40 cfs). Continued flow releases without regard to the natural hydrograph, however, can be very problematic for amphibians, and there are flow release prescriptions that have been adopted under FERC licenses for dams in the Sierra to minimize impacts to amphibians.

This discussion clarified that there is a potential conflict between managing a stream for amphibians and for steelhead, particularly when spring flow releases to encourage smolt outmigration could result in washout of egg masses and tadpoles. In other words, if we attempt to maximize the "number of good days" for steelhead we may reduce the "number of good days" for FYLF and CRLF. However, if the underlying concept for flow releases is allow natural flow events to propagate downstream when they occur, it should be possible over many years to maintain both species, as they evolved together within the watershed. Tim noted that the MOU mentions "other species," and while it might require us to "thread a needle" our plans for steelhead restoration must take into account amphibian populations as well.

Gary also noted that as worded the scope was not consistent with regards to the areas of the watershed to be studied, and it was agreed that the reaches identified should be described as the initial study area to leave open the possibility of expanding the work in subsequent years. Gary and Josh noted particular interest in the region between ACDD and Little Yosemite, and Sarah noted that there is a portion of this reach that has excellent frog habitat as well.

Chuck Hanson noted that the scope as drafted envisions field work in the fall, using the onset of the rainy season to take measurements of habitat attributes in the creek under varying flow conditions. While this have the benefit of eliminating spring flow releases and their potential impacts on amphibians, Chuck noted that this can make obtaining quality data a challenge. This is because it is essential that there are stable flows in the creek during the period of time that habitat attributes are being measured, in order to make meaningful comparisons of habitat attributes at different levels of flow. Such stable

in flow conditions in a flashy watershed like Alameda Creek are much more easily obtained by reservoir releases than by natural flows.

Andy agreed to revise the draft scope of work (especially Task 1.3) to reflect the discussion of amphibians, and to expand the scope of the technical workshop to include minimizing the impact of the study on amphibians. In order to expedite implementation of the project, the consensus of the Subcommittee was that the initial tasks (reconnaissance, planning, development of the sampling and analysis plan) should go forward.

Tim expressed concern about the rate of development of the Subcommittee's flows scope. He indicated that his agency has vital interests in keeping to their proposed project schedule, which has new dam construction beginning late in 2009. He does not see how the proposed work can produce results useful for construction permit conditions by regulatory agencies. Gary and Tim agreed to discuss further how construction permitting can be integrated with the results of the flow studies.

Next Meeting

The Subcommittee agreed to hold it's next meeting on June 5th after the scheduled Work Group meeting. These meetings will be held at ACWD.

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 PM.