



Coordinating Advancement of Wetland Science and Management on the Central Coast

Charter & Program Objectives

By
The Central Coast Wetlands Group

Updated 2012

Introduction

The Central California Coast is unique in its diversity of wetland habitats. The region includes two major estuary systems (Morro Bay and Elkhorn Slough), many rivers and coastal lagoons and numerous depressional wetland systems. These wetlands perform an array of important functions: flood attenuation, water filtration and provision of wildlife habitat. Many of these systems, however, have been impaired by various land uses including forestry, agriculture, grazing, and urbanization. Reclamation projects implemented during the first half of the 20th century to increase lands for agriculture and other uses led to significant degradation and loss of Central Coast wetlands. Recent trends have many of these rural land uses rapidly converting to urban development. As the Central Coast responds to this urban growth pressure, wetland loss threatens to become more permanent. The increased need for housing, flood control and stormwater can lead to the “concrete” loss of wetland resources.

There are individual efforts on the Central Coast to integrate the science, restoration and management of these important wetland systems with both rural and urban land uses. Currently, there are many groups throughout the Central Coast working with landowners to identify wetlands on their properties and practice wetland restoration activities in concert with landowners’ other land use practices. However, conservation goals will be better served if organizations collaborate to produce and distribute high quality wetland science information to local property owners and decision makers.

Local wetland conservation efforts often do not include a regional perspective when designing and implementing restoration and monitoring objectives. The fact is, grant funds seldom allow for such coordinated forethought, often limiting expenditures to “on the ground” implementation and project evaluation. The collective set of objectives and activities outlined within this program will empower local partners with the ability to weave their activities into a regional framework; one that considers a broader perspective, is based on sound scientific principles and addresses regional goals.

Mission Statement

To coordinate the advancement of wetland science and management on the Central Coast.

The Central Coast Wetlands Group works towards a set of objectives and activities which will support public agencies and nongovernmental organizations’ efforts to improve the restoration of Central Coast wetlands and develop methods to evaluate the success of these actions. The program will provide the Central Coast with the necessary infrastructure to help California meet and surpass the state “no net loss” wetland policy. Working collaboratively with the numerous local and regional partners currently working to protect wetlands, the program will enhance our ability to restore aquatic resources through regional information transfer and program

evaluation. Outcomes will include a more complete regional inventory of wetlands, a strategy to improve the transfer of wetland information, a repository for technical reports and monitoring information, the tools and techniques necessary to evaluate current and future restoration efforts, periodically report on successes and shortfalls, and guidance towards a more cohesive regional restoration effort in the future.

The working principles and program objectives of the California's Central Coast Wetlands Restoration and Assessment Program were developed by Central Coast Wetland Working Group members to solidify common objectives, define general limitations in resources and outline a set of steps necessary to improve the coordinated conservation of Central Coast wetlands. A key first action will be to establish a Scientific Advisory Panel, tasked with establishing a regional wetland science dialog.

Working Principles

The Central Coast Wetlands Working Group is a partnership of agencies, scientists and non-governmental organizations working on wetland preservation and restoration activities on the Central Coast (www.centralcoastwetlands.org), spearheaded by the California Coastal Commission. The group formed in response to federal and state interests in coordinating wetland activities throughout California. The State and Federal Governments have adopted a "No Net Loss" policy for wetlands, but currently have few mechanisms to track the implementation or success of actions meant to achieve this policy. The Central Coast Wetland Working Group has begun to build the necessary regional infrastructure, relying heavily on the Group members who have active programs spread throughout the Central Coast.

Similar programs in southern California and the San Francisco Bay and Delta areas have been instrumental in the increased support and funding of local activities in these regions. Until recently, the Central Coast has lacked an analogous coordinating body. In 2001, the California Coastal Commission, the Morro Bay National Estuary Program, and the California Conservation Corps. formed a partnership to build an online inventory of wetland resource for the Central Coast. Those activities, now complete, led to coordination with other regional groups and from there to a linkage with a state-wide effort to protect and restore wetlands. The Working Group will use the Program to help coordinate efforts and develop a regional wetland restoration and assessment program.

Program Objectives and Benefits

Below are a set of program objectives identified by Working Group members. These objectives continue to be unmet; most commonly because they exceed the regional or programmatic scope of the individual partners. Working Group members believe that by working together with State and Federal partners, these objectives can be met. Each objective is intended to improve the regions ability to restore wetlands or quantify the success of protecting or

improving wetland habitat. Together the objectives of California's Central Coast Wetlands Restoration and Assessment Program will help to ensure a dynamic mosaic of functioning wetlands exists within all of the 11 Central Coast watersheds, sufficient in size, condition, and diversity to sustain a full range of wetland functions.

Objectives:

1. Provide resources to advance the science of wetland restoration and management on the Central Coast.

The science of wetland restoration is still young, and much of the important work on the Central Coast has not been published in peer-reviewed journals. The Program will help to support the publication of local and regional restoration projects, highlighting the improvement in habitat condition and water quality. The program will also help to disseminate information through the Central Coast Wetlands Group website.

2. Support standard monitoring and assessment techniques and the creation of a Central Coast wetland monitoring program.

Critical in addressing the State "no net loss" policy, is to understand where wetlands exist presently, the current habitat condition, and the relationship between present quantity and quality of wetlands and the historic condition.

3. Provide a regional voice to state decision makers

The State looks to regional partners to implement the "no net loss" policy for wetlands. CCWG has been an active partner with the State to develop and test wetland assessment and tracking products on the Central Coast. The establishment of a regional program will help to solidify this relationship and provide a structure for future dialog and collaboration. The intent is to improve the link between local expertise and state decision-making as well as the link between state and federal funding and local project implementation.

4. Provide regional perspective in developing restoration objectives and policy

Most restoration plans and implementation projects are designed based on local or watershed concerns and objectives. Few on the Central Coast have referenced the historic quantity and distribution of wetlands from a regional perspective. Little has been quantified as to the regional extent of various classes of wetlands or the current regional distribution and condition of these wetland classes. The program will help provide the current and historic perspective and correlate this distribution of wetlands with current restoration objectives. Gaps and inadequacies can then be identified and a plan of action defined at a regional level.

5. Build capacity for long term wetland management

Most restoration programs last till the end of the funding. Long term monitoring and maintenance are seldom supported. As a result, many restoration projects are successful in the short term but fail to provide permanent wetland habitat. This limits the regions ability to maintain restoration projects, leading to loss of long term information on restoration success and management of habitat condition. CCWG tries to provide options that will work towards ensuring the maintenance and preservation of resorted wetlands.

6. Support stronger wetlands conservation policies and reduce the threat from future land use changes.

Significant funds have been directed at restoring wetland habitat within all of the Central Coast watersheds. Simultaneously, however, land use changes and urbanization are leading to additional stress on current wetlands and the potential loss of wetland acreage and function in the future. Better conservation of wetlands through stronger development policies that recognize the state investment in wetlands is needed. The Program will help to support wetland conservation policies within local communities by providing information on wetland distribution, restoration project status, habitat condition, and opportunities to coordinate development with habitat conservation.

Benefits

Coordination of efforts among local partners is the best way to ensure the Central Coast region attains the “no net loss” state objectives. Benefits from the implementation of this program include:

- **Provide a link to state and federal programs**
- **Publish local project results in peer review journals**
- **Seek unique funding opportunities to support regional restoration objectives**
- **Minimize duplicative efforts amongst working group members**
- **Develop and support interregional partnerships with San Francisco and Southern California**



Figure 1: Program Boundary

The boundaries were selected to reflect the regional collaboration currently underway and to fill a gap in coordinated wetland restoration programs which exist between the boundaries of the San Francisco Joint Venture and the Southern California Wetland Recovery Program.

Primary Objectives and Activities

Objective 1. Provide resources to advance the science of wetland restoration and management on the Central Coast

Activity 1.1 Provide resources to wetland restoration projects to enhance monitoring and research activities commonly not supported by implementation grants.

Activity 1.2 Develop a scientific advisory panel consisting of scientists, land managers, and public agencies that will work together to support regional restoration efforts.

Activity 1.3 Complete a current wetland inventory and create a historic map of wetlands necessary to better define future restoration opportunities.

Activity 1.4 Create and maintain a regional web interface to provide links to local wetland restoration and planning information and scientific reports.

Activity 1.5 Forge links with local universities to instigate and facilitate wetland research.

Activity 1.6 Review data to assess benefits to water quality from restoring coastal wetlands.

Activity 1.7 Integrate science objectives into regional education programs including support of university graduate student research.

Objective 2. Support standard monitoring and assessment techniques and the creation of a Central Coast wetland monitoring program.

Activity 2.1 Expand the Central Coast Wetland Inventory

Activity 2.2 Support the development of the California Rapid Assessment Method for wetlands (CRAM) on the Central Coast and use the method to assess the condition of existing wetlands.

Activity 2.3 Integrate CRAM as a project evaluation tool.

Activity 2.4 Create probabilistic habitat assessment of Central Coast wetlands to evaluate future wetland conservation efforts.

Activity 2.5 Evaluate mechanisms to link local and regional monitoring and assessment programs to the Regional and State water boards, including SWAMP, TMDLs, 404 permitting, and development of beneficial uses.

Objective 3. Provide a regional voice to state decision makers

Activity 3.1 Participate as a member of the State’s Wetland Monitoring Program.

Activity 3.2 Review current wetland conservation activities and identify weaknesses.

Activity 3.3 Use CRAM and other tools to evaluate recent wetland permit activities.

Activity 3.4 Define funding strategy to support Program activities.

Objective 4. Provide regional perspective in developing restoration objectives and policy

Activity 4.1 Create the tools to track and evaluate the regions efforts to protect, enhance and restore wetlands.

Activity 4.2 Generate regional dialog regarding future restoration needs.

Activity 4.3 Evaluate differences between the current and historical distribution of wetlands.

Objective 5. Build capacity for long term wetland management

Activity 5.1 Support long-term wetland monitoring of restoration activities to ensure consistency and efficiency.

Activity 5.2 Find support for long term maintenance of restoration projects.

Objective 6. Support stronger wetlands conservation policies in order to reduced wetland loss from future land use changes

Activity 6.1 Identify future impacts to wetlands from land use changes and urban growth demands

Activity 6.2 Prepare guidance documents for local planners for integration into general plans and local coastal programs

Activity 6.3 Evaluate how wetland and riparian restoration objectives conflict with municipal flood control needs.

Activity 6.4 identify policy mechanisms for more consistent conservation of wetlands and buffers.

Activity 6.5 Evaluate wetland permitting obstacles and legal liabilities for created wetlands and water quality treatment systems.

Activity 6.6 Develop mechanisms that encourage collaboration between landowners and agencies in the restoration and conservation of wetlands.

CCWG History

Original Coordinating Committee

California Coastal Commission, Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, US EPA, California Resources Agency, Association of Monterey Bay Area Governments, Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, Moss Landing Marine Laboratories, Elkhorn Slough National Estuary Research Reserve, Morro Bay National Estuary Program, Cal State Monterey Bay, Cal Poly Tech. San Luis Obispo, Monterey and Santa Cruz County RCD.

Collaborative Funding Structure

CCWG partners with numerous contracting institutions to solicit and manage grant funds. Organizations we partner with frequently write grants including us as subcontractors, and we do the same. Acquired funds will be directed to the contracting entity that is eligible to receive such funds and is most capable of distributing those funds to partners interested in completing the grant tasks.

Project Prioritization

CCWG does not establish new priorities for habitat restoration. However, it recognizes that many partners have developed plans and objectives for their wetland programs. The Program will work to enhance wetland efforts and supports:

- All projects that address regional restoration needs
- All projects that use comparable monitoring and assessment techniques
- All projects that strive for regional collaboration regarding objectives and technique (i.e. inclusion of a scientific advisory committee, etc.)