Wetland Ecological and Compliance Assessments in the San Francisco Bay Region, California (Draft Final Report, August 1, 2003)

ABSTRACT

The San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board (SFB RWQCB) and the San Francisco District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (U.S. ACOE) are looking for an expeditious means to determine whether regulated wetland projects produce ecologically valuable systems and remain in compliance with their permits (i.e., fulfill their legal requirements) until project completion. A study was therefore undertaken in which twenty compensatory wetland mitigation projects in the San Francisco Bay Region were reviewed and assessed for both permit compliance and habitat function, and this was done using a rapid assessment method adapted for this purpose. Thus, in addition to determining compliance and function, a further goal of this study was to test the efficacy of the assessment method, which, if useful, could be applied not only to mitigation projects, but also to restoration projects and natural wetland systems. In addition to the State and Regional Water Boards, the results should prove useful to other state agencies such as the California Coastal Conservancy which is increasingly responsible for more and larger wetland acquisition and restoration projects.

Survey results suggest that most projects permitted five or more years ago are in compliance with their permit conditions and are realizing their intended habitat functions. The larger restoration sites or those situated between existing wetland sites tend to be more successful and to offer more benefits to wildlife than the smaller isolated ones. These results are consistent with regulatory experience suggesting that economies of scale could be realized both with (1) large scale regional wetland restoration sites, through which efforts are combined to control invasive species and share costs, and (2) coordinated efforts by regulatory agencies to track project information and to monitor the increasing number and size of mitigation and restoration sites.