

Cases Studies In Cooperative Conservation Meeting Statewide Water and Resource Management Objectives

North Coast: Mattole Restoration Council

The North Coast Regional Water Board has combined its Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) program and state grant programs with its participation as a stakeholder in the Mattole Restoration Council (MRC) to implement sediment and temperature control measures on the Mattole River, a Clean Water Act 303(d) listed water body. By partnering with the MRC, along with the Mattole Salmon Group, the state and federal resource agencies have been able to rely on the Council to contribute substantially to implementation of the sediment and temperature TMDLs completed by the Regional Board in 2002 and 2003.

This partnership has facilitated obtaining landowner permission for access to private land and contributed toward building good community cooperation. The MRC, through its leadership, has provided for road improvements and road decommissioning, stream bank stabilization, invasive plant removal and revegetation with native species, monitoring and data collection, water conservation, habitat improvement, sediment control, conservation easements, public education and outreach to the community and landowners.

The MRC also assisted the Regional Board by creating the Mattole River and Range Partnership which adopted and now oversees an MOU for cooperative programs among the MRC, Mattole Salmon Group, the Middle Mattole Conservancy, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Mattole Fire Safety Council, North Coast Regional Water Board, Department of Fish and Game, Department of Forestry, National Marine Fisheries Service, National Park Service and Humboldt County. More than 250 landowners are directly involved in the work of the Partnership to implement the objectives in the State sponsored North Coast Watershed Assessment Synthesis Report, which include, coastal resources management, salmon recovery, implementation of TMDLs and best management practices for water quality protection.

North Coast: Mattole Watershed Flow Improvement Program

The Coho Recovery Strategy, prepared by the Department of Fish and Game, identified the upper Mattole River as offering an outstanding opportunity for coho salmon recovery along California's North Coast. Local citizens groups including the Mattole Restoration Council, Sanctuary Forest, and the Mattole Salmon Group have restored dozens of miles of high-quality spawning and rearing streams in the past twenty five years. However, a new threat has emerged: the loss of critical summertime streamflows. In fact, in recent years the upper eight miles of the river have gone dry, resulting in the death of thousands of juvenile coho salmon and steelhead.

The Mattole River and Range Partnership facilitated the development of the Mattole Flow Program to provide a flexible, innovative, and voluntary solution to this problem: provide landowners with water tanks to reduce the need for summertime residential water withdrawals. In exchange for a storage tank, water users sign a voluntary, binding agreement to forego water diversion during critical summer months. To date, over fifteen water users have signed on. When fully implemented, the Program is projected to increase late September and early October stream flows in the upper Mattole River by three or four times previous levels.

While the Flow Program involved many technical challenges, it would not have happened without the will and support of the local community, via its watershed partnership, bring landowners and public officials together. In this case, the Partnership (1) drew attention to critical streamflow shortages, (2) galvanized community action, (3) marshaled financial resources, (4) routed the Program through many regulatory and technical challenges, and finally (5) implemented the project through strong trust relationships with local landowners.

Los Angeles Area: Ballona Creek Watershed Task Force

The Los Angeles Water Board has called on the Ballona Creek Watershed Task Force to resolve conflicts and tension between local agencies over water quality needs in this urban watershed, including compliance with NPDES stormwater permits, and development and implementation of TMDLs. The Task Force was formed in 2001 by a local non-profit, two local agencies and the Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission. The Task Force succeeded in producing a watershed management plan in 2004 with financial assistance from Proposition 13 grant funds.

This planning process occurred within the context of lawsuits and appeals filed by some of the participating agencies against the Regional Water board over TMDLs and stormwater permits. The watershed management plan addresses stormwater management, flood protection, habitat loss, and open space protection and recreation. The plan also addresses the lack of water quality data which is needed to develop appropriate recommendations and projects.

The Ballona Creek Watershed Task Force managed to successfully resolve conflicts resulting in a plan acceptable to the Regional Water board and other participating stakeholders. As a result, the plan is being implemented in coordination with an Army Corps of Engineers Ecosystem Restoration study that lays out specific water quality improvement measures.

Resolving the conflicts over water quality issues has led community leaders to see the Watershed Task Force as a credible tool to resolve other controversial issues, including, TMDL implementation, stormwater management programs, beneficial use analyses, wetlands restoration and protection, land acquisition needs, and bicycle/pedestrian master

plans. Because the watershed partnership was in place, the Task Force was able to qualify for financial assistance from the Calif. Department of Conservation to support a watershed coordinator, which has greatly expanded the effectiveness of the partnership to collaborate with local officials and the public, as well as serve as a public participation vehicle for the Regional Water Board.

Sacramento River: Sacramento River Watershed Program

The Sacramento River Watershed Program (SRWP) was formed to address decades of conflict among landowners; state, federal and local governments; community groups; and environmental organizations over flood protection, salmon fisheries management, water supply, and wildlife habitat protection in the Sacramento watershed, covering 27,000 square miles from the Oregon Border to the Delta.

The SRWP provides critical linkage for the Central Valley Regional Water Board to a broad array of stakeholders in a very large and complex watershed to accomplish multiple water quality needs. The SRWP's collaborative, consensus-based partnerships have succeeded in coordinating research and monitoring, developing acceptable public education messages regarding water quality, and implementing a wide array of projects targeting water supply, quality and conservation, fisheries and river restoration, and flood damage reduction. This partnership has helped identify management strategies for high priority contaminants, including organophosphate pesticides and mercury. The SRWP conducts a water quality monitoring program that provides baseline, main-stem river data used by the Regional Board to support special studies and the development of TMDLs. In addition, the Regional Board coordinates its SWAMP monitoring program with SRWP to stretch its limited resources for collecting water quality data.

Feather River: Feather River Coordinated Resource Management Program

The Feather River Coordinated Resource Management Program (FRCRMP) arose out of the crisis that excessive erosion was creating for hydropower operations, recreation, and aquatic habitat conditions. The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control board entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with approximately 20 other public agencies and private entities to address the serious condition of this 3,400 square mile watershed, a region where environmental regulation had not generally received public support. As early as 1984, when the FRCRMP was formed, the Regional Board recognized that the complexities of overlapping problems in the watershed meant that water quality objectives could not be achieved through traditional regulatory and enforcement mechanisms.

The Regional Water Board provided grant funding to the Feather River Program to undertake watershed assessments, develop restoration and management plans, and carry out restoration projects. In addition, the FRCRMP is overseeing a watershed-scale monitoring program to evaluate long term trends and potential improvements. In recent years the FRCRMP has shifted from the narrowly defined erosion control focus to a strategy of restoring streams and rivers to a "natural functioning condition" that addresses

multiple water supply, flood damage, water quality and habitat concerns. This long standing effort now serves as a successful statewide model, having completed over 50 projects.

Colorado River Basin: Imperial County Farm Bureau

The effectiveness of watershed based programs and partnerships in attaining tangible progress in implementing the State's water quality goals is well illustrated by the Imperial County Farm Bureau's (ICFB) Voluntary TMDL Compliance Program which addresses the implementation of siltation and sedimentation TMDLs in the Salton Sea watershed. The program has been in operation since 1998 and enables individual agricultural operations to undertake a self-determined compliance approach to non-point source regulations. The program is operated by four ICFB staff who facilitate group participation and provide technical assistance for the owners of approximately 470,000 acres of farm fields.

The ICFB Voluntary TMDL Compliance Program is a remarkable partnership involving the Regional Water Board, the Imperial County Farm Bureau and valley farmers. The program is a grassroots educational and technical assistance program for farmers to implement farm practices that reduce the amount of silt and agricultural chemicals in farm runoff water. Silt reduction satisfies Regional Board requirements for the three siltation-sedimentation TMDLs adopted for the New River, Alamo River, and Imperial Valley drains that discharge directly into the Salton Sea. Monitoring indicates that the New and Alamo Rivers are attaining their three year interim targets for total suspended solid concentrations.

This program demonstrates the advantages of sharing responsibility for identifying and solving water quality problems by engaging stakeholders who can be most affected by regulations and often most effective in fixing problems. Goals are being reached through a combination of out-reach, demonstrations of practical on-farm practices, and by providing training and professional support. (The ICFB received a Governor's Environmental and Economic Development Award in 2004.)

San Francisco Bay Area: Wildcat-San Pablo Creeks Watershed Council

The Wildcat- San Pablo Creeks Watershed Council has a history of 20 years of on-the-ground accomplishments and community services in a watershed located in one of the most culturally diverse areas in the United States. The watershed council began when a group of community leaders, a fledgling urban stream group, other community organizations, and state, federal, and local agencies came together to resolve a contentious flood control controversy in the lower Wildcat-San Pablo Creeks watershed where the streams share the same flood plain. As is common with many urban watershed partnerships, the motivation for community and agency participation is controlling flood damage. However, once the partnership was established the participants recognized the utility of working collaboratively and the Watershed Council broadened its focus to include water quality, stormwater management and habitat protection and restoration.

The African American community in North Richmond helped found the watershed council. This community historically faced a pattern of racial discrimination that segregated it to flood plain lands where no one else would live. Federal flood planning and funding policies favored higher value communities rather than impoverished areas with low property values making it difficult for these residents to qualify for financial assistance to undertake damage reduction projects.

In 1985, despite overwhelming economic and political barriers, the watershed council designed a flood damage reduction project that eventually became a national model for a new generation of flood control projects. The project was constructed on the lower two miles of the two creeks in 1986-1987, breaking a 35-year political impasse between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the local community. The Army Corps, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, National Park Service, State water and resource managers, and others, embraced this case as a model for replacing single-objective planning with a multi-objective approach to designing river and flood projects.

This approach maximized community benefits and protected the environment by combining ecological restoration, education, job training, and recreation. The project also replaced—for the first time in the country—a conventional channelization project with one that integrated natural river science and ecological restoration. A design sketch used in the restoration project was later adopted by the Army Corps as one of its logos.

The success of this first project motivated the community and public officials to continue using this collaborative forum to address a broader array of concerns. The organization has evolved into an effective organization that address many issues facing citizens and public agencies within its 53-square-mile area. Some accomplishments include restoring a population of approximately 1500 adult steelhead to an urban stream, protecting and restoring 350 acres of brackish marsh providing habitat for endangered species, accomplishing five miles of riparian restoration, coordinating stream-side developments to protect and restore floodplain corridors, resolving storm-water problems, constructing 2.5 miles of regional trails, and administer an inner city youth education and training program.

San Francisco Bay Area: Napa River Community Coalition

Since 1862 the Napa River has had twenty seven major flood events resulting in significant loss of life and property. A 1986 flood killed three people and resulted in \$100 million of property damage. Despite efforts in recent decades to address the conflicts between existing and proposed development and flooding in this 426 square mile watershed, the communities in the Napa Valley could not reach agreement on how to address this problem.

In 1996 a “Community Coalition,” of 23 community organizations, five state agencies, and several federal agencies, was assembled. This watershed based partnership, included the Napa Valley Vintners Association, Napa Valley Chamber of Commerce, Napa

County Farm Bureau, homeowners associations, and the Sierra Club, among others. A watershed restoration and protection plan was developed which addressed the needs of the upper valley vineyards and wineries, as well as the downstream residents in the City of Napa.

This collaborative planning process took only two years to break through the 50 year impasse on developing a community consensus and politically feasible plan of action. As a result, voters passed, by a two-thirds vote, a 20 year, county-wide sales tax surcharge to fund the local share of a multi-objective flood damage reduction and watershed management program to be undertaken in partnership with the Army Corps of Engineers. The plan meets the resource management objectives of the Department of Fish and Game, State Lands Commission, and the Regional Water Quality Control Board. The California Department of Water Resources and Coastal Conservancy became funding partners, as well.

Implementation of the plan has already restored 600 acres of former floodplain, created a new riverside trail, contributed to restoration of downtown Napa, and relocated numerous businesses, mobile homes and rail road tracks from flood hazard areas. Toxic sites resulting from oil company operations in the past were cleaned up and restored to productive floodplain. The project has provided an incentive to the private sector to again invest in the local economy and the Napa Resource Conservation District has sponsored vineyard management programs to change the timing and extent of flood flows, protect riparian corridors and improve the quality of water for anadromous fish populations which are now recovering.

April 2007