

MEMORANDUM

April 17th, 2007

To: RMP Steering Committee

From: Mike Connor and Meg Sedlak

Re: National Water Quality Monitoring Council Pilot Network Study and the RMP

The National Water Quality Monitoring Council (NWQMC) recently selected SFEI to oversee a pilot study of the National Water Quality Monitoring Network (Network) for U.S. Coastal Waters and their Tributaries. San Francisco Bay was one of three estuaries selected for the pilot study Network. The goal of the Network is to provide information about the health of oceans and coastal ecosystems and inland influences on coastal waters for improved resource management.

The Network is unique because it uses an integrated, multidisciplinary approach and addresses a broad range of water resources, from upland watersheds to offshore waters. The design was developed by 80 representatives working through NWQMC, including from Federal, state and local government organizations, universities, water associations, and the private sector. The Council is a sub-committee of the Advisory Committee on Water Information, which is managed by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) for the Department of Interior. The Committee was charged to develop the design of the Network by the President's Council on Environmental Quality in response to a recommendation from the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy.

The Network will coordinate water monitoring across the Nation to provide a comprehensive database and understanding on water resources and the health of ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes resources. The pilot phase of the Network will, for three geographic areas including Delaware River Basin, Lake Michigan, and San Francisco Bay, examine current monitoring and gaps in relation to the proposed Network design specifications. This pilot phase will be completed by January, 2008. These three pilot areas were selected from among 12 expressed areas of interest from around the country. Although not selected for the pilot phase, all of these areas will continue to be engaged to facilitate the future implementation of the Network across the U.S.

The pilot phase is the second step of implementing the Network design, which is being coordinated with both the Integrated Ocean Observing System and the U.S. Group on Earth Observations. The next demonstration phase is anticipated to begin in 2008, and most likely will involve improvements to existing monitoring sites, and installation of new sites, sensors, and data systems needed to fill critical data gaps in selected regions. Further Network efforts will facilitate the development of regional elements of a National coastal observing system, and will be a key element in addressing coastal resource management issues.

The goal of the pilot network is to further refine the existing design in order to submit a report for funding of a national network in fiscal year 2008. The current plan includes inventorying existing data, identifying gaps in current data, evaluating questions to be answered by filling existing gaps, and determining costs of network implementation for future proposal of a national network. Additionally, seven small Network Refinement Workgroups, each focusing on one element: wetlands, beaches, nutrients, metals and organic contaminants, biological characteristics, atmospheric deposition, and groundwater, will work further on specific elements of the network.

The current timeline is:

- draft format for data inventory by mid to late April
- format for pilot study reports by mid to late April
- plans for monitoring various elements included in the Workgroups by mid to late May
- select targeted sampling sites by mid to late May
- inventory existing data by early to mid June
- identify data management and access issues by mid June
- data gap analysis by July to mid June
- compile management issues that could be better addressed if national network was implemented
- estimate costs of current monitoring and costs to fill gaps
- draft pilot study report documenting the activities and results by mid November
- national-level report by mid to late November.

By participating in the pilot network SFEI not only has the opportunity to identify critical gaps in our current knowledge, but also becomes eligible for funding to fill the existing gaps in the monitoring network from agencies including the USGS and NOAA. Additionally, the efforts of SFEI and the other two pilot studies will provide valuable information vital for potential funding of a national monitoring network in FY2008.

In order to support this effort we request that the Steering Committee approve the use of RMP staff time for the network pilot study. We estimate that it will require approximately 200 hours of staff time at a total cost of \$25,000.