



MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 12, 2024
TO: Advisory Committee, San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority
FROM: Erica Johnson, Project Manager
Jessica Davenport, Deputy Program Manager
SUBJECT: Preliminary Staff Recommendation on Wetland Regional Monitoring Program Social Indicators to Adopt as Authority Performance Measures Regarding Equity

The Authority has a strong partnership with the Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program (WRMP), which we helped to support by funding the Science Elements of the WRMP. Authority staff also participate on the WRMP Steering Committee and People & Wetlands Workgroup alongside other regional, state, and non-profit entities to help guide a regional wetland monitoring effort. One expected outcome of the partnership is alignment between the WRMP Indicators and Authority Performance Measures (PMs). Representatives of the WRMP presented an update on this alignment for new habitat quality PMs and their progress on developing social indicators to the Advisory Committee (AC) at its September 2023 meeting. WRMP staff are developing and analyzing the habitat indicators and will use input from the AC members and Authority staff to develop content for future Authority annual reports.

The WRMP staff working on the social indicators in the People & Wetland Workgroup have recently proposed indicators for the region. The proposed social indicators and the management questions they address can be referenced in the December 4, 2023, People & Wetlands Indicators Proposal to the WRMP Steering Committee (Attachment 1).

We are introducing our preliminary staff recommendation (below) to the AC as an informational item to seek input or comments on the staff's approach to aligning the WRMP's proposed social indicators with the Authority's PMs. While these indicators have been conceptualized by the workgroup, the methodology to obtain the information and analyze it has not yet been developed.

AC members will have the opportunity to engage in further discussion by attending the next Ad Hoc Equity Subcommittee meeting on April 22, 2024, or by emailing their comments to staff by Tuesday, April 30, 2024. Staff intend to bring a revised proposal for new equity PMs back to the AC for a vote in Fall 2024 to recommend their use in future annual reports and to guide the development of five-year equity plans. The proposed habitat PMs will also be presented at the same meeting.

Authority Staff Recommendation

The Authority currently has one PM that considers social equity for Authority-funded projects: “Percentage of projects that benefit economically disadvantaged communities”. Staff believe that additional equity PMs would help Authority staff identify gaps in the Authority’s project investments, communicate the impact of Authority-funded projects, and increase accountability to our proposed Equity Guidelines (Attachment 2). Authority staff have reviewed the WRMP indicators and indicated which ones that would be beneficial to understanding the social impact of Authority-funded projects within the region and can become Authority PMs. Some of the proposed indicators focus on issues that cannot be addressed by Authority funding and therefore would not be appropriate Authority PMs.

One of the terms used in the People & Wetlands Indicators Proposal (Attachment 1) is “Environmental Justice (EJ) communities,” broadly defined as communities who have historically been marginalized, are low income, and/or experience disproportionate environmental burdens. In cases where EJ communities are mentioned, the Authority will use our definition of Economically Disadvantaged Community (EDC)¹ as the social equity lens for our PMs. The document also refers to the results of data collection and analysis as “indicators”, meant to inform, or answer key management questions that were accepted by the WRMP Steering Committee.

Easily attainable social indicators that can be adopted as Authority PMs this year

The indicators listed below were determined by the People & Wetlands Workgroup to be of low cost and effort for WRMP staff to collect data and provide a deliverable for the SF Bay and have also been determined by Authority staff as being suitable to adopt as a PM this year.

1. Regional map of wetland restoration projects and their stated benefits (flood protection, water quality improvement, wildlife habitat, and public access), overlaid with Environmental Justice community maps.

The purpose of this indicator is to understand the spatial distribution of wetland restoration projects and their impact on communities in the region. This would inform where projects and their benefits have been distributed across the region and to what extent EJ communities have also received those benefits.

The Authority currently tracks which of these four benefits are provided by each project, based on the grantee’s application and work program. Staff propose expanding the current metric for “% Projects that benefit Economically Disadvantaged Communities” (EDC) to include a count of each stated benefit that occurs in (or near) an EDC. This will be the first step to improving the PM. When the WRMP further develops this and other social equity indicators for the region, Authority staff will revisit this PM and propose additional categorizations or analysis to improve our understanding of the impact and/or quality of benefits to communities.

Our proposed approach is a first step to measure our agency’s performance in providing equitable distribution of benefits from Authority-funded projects. See Equity Guideline 5,

¹ [Economically Disadvantaged Communities are defined in the Authority’s Request for Proposals](#) and the [Economically Disadvantaged Communities Reference Sheet](#).

Project Benefits, items a-c (Achieve more restoration in areas accessible to EDCs, provide more public access amenities in or near EDCs, provide flood protection to EDCs.)

2. Temporal trends in proportion of wetland decision-makers from underrepresented groups.

The purpose of this indicator is to track the changes in participation of representatives from EJ communities in decision making about wetland projects. This information can be paired with other information to see how representation impacts EJ communities regarding wetland projects.

The Authority staff believes that to serve its full purpose, this indicator is best for a special study especially regarding the linkage between representation and impact on EJ communities. However, staff still propose some aspects of this indicator to adopt as a PM by showing the percentage of people who represent an EDC or a tribal community on our staff, Board, Advisory Committee, and Oversight Committee annually. This proposed PM will allow us to begin tracking and making progress toward achieving representation on our staff and leadership that reflects the diversity of the Bay Area. See Equity Guideline 1, Representation, item a.

Moderately attainable social indicators to be adopted as a PM in the future

The indicators listed below were determined by the People & Wetlands Workgroup to be of moderate cost and effort for WRMP staff to collect data and provide a deliverable for the SF Bay region. Authority staff would like this indicator to be considered for adoption as a PM when it is further developed.

3. Temporal trends in wetland restoration projects reporting paid community or Tribal partners, public meetings, and outreach strategies to Environmental Justice communities or Tribes.

The purpose of this indicator is to understand whether projects are engaging EJ communities and tribes in wetland stewardship in a meaningful or accessible way, and it tracks how they are engaged.

Authority staff recommend including some aspects of this indicator as a PM by tracking what and how many best practices for meaningfully engaging communities that each project implements. Some examples include: (1) a budget for community and/or tribal engagement, (2) involvement of communities/tribes as project partners or in project's decision-making process, (3) stipends to community or tribe members, (4) public meetings, workshops, community events, (5) stewardship days.

Our proposed approach will allow us to quantify to what extent a project includes meaningful engagement and measure the impact of our policies on increasing the capacity for these best practices. See Equity Guideline 4, Meaningful Engagement, items c (“encourage grant applicants to include community engagement in the scope of work for their project, and to include funding for community engagement tasks, such as food and childcare, in grant budgets”) and d (“to support inclusion of California Native American voices, leadership, and perspectives, including traditional ecological knowledge and tribal stewardship”).

4. Temporal trends in representative participation in stewardship and education events/programs.

This indicator would be produced by collecting demographic information (e.g. race/ethnicity, income background) of participants in stewardship and education events and programs to help project implementors understand whether stewardship and education are reaching or equitably serving EJ communities and tribes.

Staff would like to work with the WRMP People & Wetland Work Group to develop this metric over time. staff are interested in seeing the demographic information of the volunteers and youth engaged in stewardship, educational, and workforce development activities of the projects that the Authority funds, however Authority data would be a small portion of bay wide data on stewardship participation demographics.

Staff support seeing this kind of information on a regional level from ongoing programs that offer stewardship, outdoor education, and workforce development opportunities along the shoreline. The information can be useful to the Authority in identifying which groups need additional outreach and engagement efforts when advising on projects. A template of a form used to collect demographic information used by the State Coastal Conservancy's Explore the Coast program is included as Attachment 3 as an example. This was also shared with the WRMP People & Wetlands Workgroup. The demographic information includes race and ethnicity, types of disabilities, identities, and other social groups with limited opportunities.

Easily and moderately attainable social indicators that will be useful for the region but are not suitable for use as Authority PMs.

The indicators listed below are focus on issues that either cannot be addressed by Authority funding, would be better to track on a regional scale (not by project), or is better communicated in a different format (such as a study or tool) and therefore would not be appropriate Authority PMs.

5. Regional map of wetlands with nearby public access and key amenities/features, overlaid with EJ maps.

The purpose of this indicator is to be able to evaluate the distribution of public access amenities in proximity to wetlands across the Bay, and inform decisions by funders, regulatory agencies, planners, and project implementors about where and what additional public access amenities could be planned in the region.

Authority staff have no recommendations for our PMs regarding this indicator because the Authority already has PMs for public access amenities and whether the project benefits an EDC. We agree that this would be good information for us to consider as funders when determining the benefits of a project and will participate in contributing information from Authority-funded projects.

6. Regional map of wetland wave attenuation metrics (modeled capacity to attenuate waves), overlaid with EJ maps.

The purpose of this indicator is to evaluate how well a wetland is attenuating wave energy for a given area, and how wave attenuation, as a component of flood risk reduction, is distributed

regionally. The information may help inform future planning for nature-based adaptations to address flood risk.

Authority staff do not recommend this as an addition to the Authority PMs because as one of many components of flood risk reduction, this indicator may be better communicated as a part of broader information about flood risks and the benefits of wetlands. In addition, the breadth of Authority projects includes other shoreline habitats and features whose flood protection benefits work together and may be better communicated by proposed indicator #1 above.

7. Map of basic water quality metrics (dissolved oxygen) & nearshore contaminants, overlaid with Environmental Justice maps.

This indicator evaluates water quality throughout the region to inform selection of projects that improve water quality, especially in pollution- burdened communities. The indicator may also be used to inform communities where accessible shorelines may be unsuitable for fishing or recreation.

Staff do not recommend a PM for this indicator. The Authority supports projects that improve water quality, but achieving good water quality has many other factors that Authority-funded projects alone cannot achieve. For that reason, we do not recommend water quality be measured by the Authority on a project-by-project basis but instead feel that it would be a useful tool for us to use when considering projects and their potential benefits or impacts to water quality.

8. Spatial and temporal trends in visitation estimates, visitor origins, reasons for visiting, and demographics.

The purpose of this indicator is to understand the trends in visitation to publicly accessible wetland areas and help land managers understand whether sites are accessed equitably by local groups and make management changes (e.g. new amenities, features, programs) that achieve equitable access.

Staff do not recommend a PM for this indicator at this time because the agency does not fund long-term programming that could influence visitation from underrepresented groups of people. Our funding can only support short-term community engagement activities related to a restoration project. Authority staff can direct land managers and programs that seek Authority funding to contribute information to this effort with the guidance and support from the WRMP.

Conclusion

Our partnership with the WRMP and its People & Wetlands Workgroup has provided valuable insights and considerations for how the Authority can participate in and benefit from regional monitoring to better understand and communicate the impact of Authority-funded projects to the region's wetlands and communities. The social indicators proposed by the WRMP People & Wetland Workgroup, while not all relevant to measuring the Authority's performance, will provide valuable insights for future funding decisions. We intend to continue to coordinate with the WRMP to seek alignment with their social indicators over the long term.

In the near-term, staff look forward to working with the AC and the Board to convert the most relevant and attainable WRMP social indicators into Authority PMs that we can use to hold ourselves accountable for implementing the Authority's proposed Equity Guidelines.