

**San Francisco Bay Area Water Trail Steering Committee
Meeting Summary
June 6, 2006**

Next Meeting—Tuesday, July 18th, 1:00 p.m. - 4:30 p.m., BCDC

Key Outcomes

- ▶ The Water Trail Steering Committee (Committee), members of the public, invited experts, and project staff discussed potential water trail-related wildlife, habitat and water quality issues.
- ▶ The Committee reviewed and discussed four principles to structure and guide how the water trail plan will address wildlife, habitat and water quality issues.

Action Items

Responsible	Task	Deadline
Steering Committee	Email or call Sara Polgar with any additional ideas and comments on the staff recommendation (pp. 26-28) in the background report on wildlife, habitat and water quality.	6/23
Steering Committee	Review proposed wildlife, habitat and water quality management strategies (handed out at Meeting 3) and come prepared to discuss these at Meeting 4.	7/18
Sara Polgar	Incorporate changes to the principles and distribute to Committee	7/18

Presentation on the Wildlife, Habitat and Water Quality Background Report

Sara Polgar gave an overview presentation on the background report. She summarized the potential wildlife, habitat and water quality issues related to non-motorized small boating (NMSB) activities, locations and conditions where and when these issues might occur. She also reviewed regulations, management plans and Bay jurisdictions that form the existing management framework for water trail policies. For a copy of the Background Report on Wildlife, Habitat and Water Quality Issues, please contact Sara Polgar (415/352-3645 sarap@bcdc.ca.gov).

Experts' Presentations and Discussion

Jana Sokale, Environmental Planner, gave an overview of the Wildlife and Public Access Compatibility Study conducted for the Bay Trail Project. She described overall findings and the ways in which the results do and do not apply to the water trail. Jana also highlighted the study as an example of a research and monitoring approach that may be appropriate for increasing our knowledge about water trail-related wildlife disturbance issues. She emphasized the need for water

trail management policies to be comprehensive yet flexible to account for changing conditions in the Bay and facilitate adaptive management of trail heads and on-water activities.

Jules Evens, Principal, Avocet Research Associates, spoke about trends reported in the literature on disturbance of birds (mostly shorebirds and waterfowl). Some of these identified trends were

- migratory bird species are more sensitive to disturbances around migration times;
- the distance at which birds flush (take flight or dive to escape) tends to increase (i.e. show greater sensitivity) with larger species and flocks of birds, as well as greater availability of food;
- at the population level, numerous small disturbances appear to be more damaging than few large disturbances; and
- tangential approaches tend to be less disturbing to birds than direct approaches.

Both Jules and Jana emphasized that bird responses to, and any effects of, disturbances are dependent on situation-specific factors, (e.g. type of disturbance, species, time of year, etc.) and, as a result, it is tough to generalize about disturbance effects. In response to questions from the group, Jules noted that although there is little in the literature that specifically addresses wildlife disturbance due to non-motorized small boats, a handful of studies (including his in the Berkeley area) that address this issue are currently underway or in print.

Sarah Allen, Senior Scientist, National Park Service, Pt. Reyes National Seashore, presented results of a recently-completed study of disturbances of harbor seals hauled out at three sites in the Bay. A key point to emerge from Sarah's presentation and the discussion was that preventing disturbance of harbor seals at haul outs is critical to protecting the Bay population of seals. The seals rely on these sites for resting and raising pups, and the number of suitable haul out locations around the Bay is limited. A few haul out sites – at Mowry Slough, Castro Rocks and Yerba Buena Island – are especially important because seals have used them heavily for hundreds of years. Furthermore, harbor seals are more susceptible to disturbance effects at certain times of year such as pupping season (March-May) and during molt (June-July). Successful measures taken at Pt. Reyes National Seashore to prevent disturbances by kayakers and other visitors include a seasonal closure to boating activity, enforcement of the Marine Mammal Protection Act and outreach and education to visitors about low impact boating practices.

Discussion of Overarching Principles

Staff introduced four principles to structure how the water trail plan will address wildlife, habitat and water quality issues. The proposed principles (below) are discussed in the Background Report for the meeting (pp.26-28).

1. Identify sensitive wildlife and habitat areas where access should be managed or prohibited;
2. Articulate the components of a site-specific assessment that determines where to locate and how to develop, improve and manage trail heads to minimize or avoid significant adverse effects;
3. Develop detailed, feasible strategies for managing long-term use of the trail facilities and the Bay to minimize or avoid significant adverse effects to wildlife, habitat and water quality; and
4. Adapt a "Leave No Trace" outreach program and boater curriculum for the water trail.

In the discussion, the Committee's questions and comments to staff focused primarily on principles 1 and 2. Committee discussion of detailed management strategies (principle 3) was tabled for the next meeting on July 18. Some of the feedback addressed the organization of the principles and how they overlap with each other. A few recurring themes in the discussion were that:

- Trail activities in sensitive wildlife and habitat areas need to be managed;
- Potential trail heads need to be assessed in terms of potential wildlife, habitat, water quality and other issues and developed and managed to prevent or minimize anticipated problems; and
- Trail user education about these issues is an essential component of the management approach.

Other Comments about the Principles:

- Participants expressed concern that the Committee lacks a clear big-picture understanding of what the water trail will be, and that this is a stumbling block to considering the principles.
- Identifying sensitive sites that need management is the necessary driver because predicting where people will go on the water is not possible.
- Most wildlife and habitat issues are situation-specific, and achieving appropriate location, development and management of access will require case-by-case assessment to understand if and how sensitive habitat areas are affected. (Principles 1 and 2 overlap.)
- Sensitive habitats have both constant and dynamic features; harbor seal haul-out areas may be constant, but bird species change points of congregation for foraging and resting on the Bay. The water trail management policies have to provide measures for reviewing access and adapting management to accommodate changing wildlife and habitat conditions over time.
- Collapse principles 1 and 2 to link and coordinate consideration of sensitive areas with trail head development and improvement.
- Project staff will have to make recommendations that describe sensitive areas (i.e. sensitive habitat, access points, where birds are, their migratory patterns, shorebird nesting, breeding, feeding areas and seasons) to be avoided and managed as part of the water trail plan. Staff will coordinate with land and resource agencies to assure that sensitive areas are identified, but they are also seeking guidance from the Committee on where and/or what these areas are.
- The principles do not address who is going to manage trail heads and enforce regulations. Implementation planning should consider trail policies that require resources for enforcement.
- Exclude the human waste ('pack-it-out') policy from the adapted Leave No Trace ethic (on page 28 of the Background Report). This is a good policy for a wilderness setting, but it is impractical for such an urbanized area where trail users will expect bathroom facilities.

Due to limited time in the meeting, the Committee did not have the opportunity to fully explore the proposed principles, and staff is looking for additional input on these. Please email or call Sara Polgar with additional ideas and comments concerning these principles by Friday, June 23 (sarap@bcd.ca.gov tel: 415-352-3645 fax: 415-352-3640).

Correction to Meeting Summary for April 5, 2006

Under "Suggestions for Additional Strategies," the following suggestion was also made:

- Economic analysis of the cost of operating and maintaining a trail head and any interpretive or educational program attached to it (such as signage regarding sensitive species and habitats).

Meeting Participants

Steering Committee

Mike Ammon, California Department of Boating and Waterways
Margot Brown, SF Bay Harbor Safety Committee
Ted Choi, City Kayak
Arthur Feinstein, Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge
Cecily Harris, Bay Area Open Space Council
Beth Huning, San Francisco Bay Joint Venture
Jessica Parsons, Save the Bay
Jim McGrath, Bay Access, SF Boardsailing Association
Barbara Salzman, Audubon Society, Marin Chapter
Laura Thompson, ABAG Bay Trail Project
Penny Wells, Bay Access
Brian Wiese, East Bay Regional Park District

Members of the Public

Winnie Chan, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, SF Bay National Wildlife Refuge Complex
Frank and Janice Delfino, Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge
David Dolberg, Bay Access
Robert Johnson, Oyster Point Marina
Paul Kamen, Berkeley Waterfront Commission
Paul Nixon, Bay Access
Eric Ramos, U.S. Coast Guard
Casey Walker, Bay Access

Invited Experts

Sarah Allen, Senior Scientist, National Park Service
Jules Evens, Principal, Avocet Research Associates
Jana Sokale, Environmental Planner

Staff

Sara Polgar, BCDC
Ann Buell, California Coastal Conservancy
Patrycja Bossak, ABAG Bay Trail Project
Tim Corrigan, California Coastal Conservancy

Facilitator Contact Information

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