

San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission

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TO: Commissioners and Alternates

FROM: Lawrence J. Goldzband, Executive Director (415/352-3653; larry.goldzband@bcdc.ca.gov)
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SUBJECT: Staff Report and Recommendation on Two Contracts for the Sediment and Beneficial Reuse Project

(For Commission consideration on February 16, 2023)

Summary and Recommendation

The staff recommends that the Commission authorize the Executive Director to enter into two contracts: one with the San Francisco Estuary Institute/Aquatic Science Center (SFEI/ASC) for \$30,000; and one for the San Francisco Bay Joint Venture (SFBJV) for \$9,999 to support the Commission's work on the US Environmental Protection Agency and the Ocean Protection Council's grants for work on increasing sediment and soil reuse for habitat restoration and adaptation in the Bay Area. The contracts will fund SFEI/ASC's participation and ability to provide the Commission and staff scientific expertise regarding sediment issues over three years; and for SFBJV participation to provide expertise and advice regarding habitat restoration and adaptation for technical and policy document development and review, stakeholder coordination, and workshop guidance over two years. The staff further recommends that the Commission authorize the Executive Director to amend the contract as necessary, including revising the amount or duration of the agreement, so long as the amendment does not involve substantial changes to the services provided.

Staff Report

Wetlands provide transitional habitat between estuarine waters and uplands, absorb flood waters, and buffer the impact of waves along the shoreline. Historically, vast wetlands rimmed San Francisco Bay. Human activity caused the loss of approximately 80% of these wetlands in San Francisco Bay through diking and draining, resulting in deeply subsided baylands. In the 1990's, the Bay Area mobilized to restore 100,000 acres of subsided baylands through the Baylands Habitat Goals Project and 34,000 acres have since been restored or are actively in planning to be restored. Sediment dredged for navigation in the Bay has been beneficial reused to successfully restore the elevation of subsided wetland areas, such that vegetation can quickly establish. Four landscape scale projects have been or are being restored using this method, using approximately 29 million cubic yards of sediment. However, this success represents only approximately 40% of the dredged sediment that was available. It also doesn't include sediment from flood protection or other dredging projects, or excess construction project soils that could be useful in these efforts.

In 2021, the San Francisco Estuary Institute (SFEI) issued a momentous report, “Sediment for Survival,” which estimated that between 450 and 650 million cubic yards of sediment and soil would be required to restore and sustain the Bay’s wetlands through 2100, respectively. This report further mobilized stakeholders from different sectors to address this urgent need. This sediment shortage has the potential to affect Bay Area communities as they become increasingly threatened with displacement due to rising seas. Restoring the baylands provides a green infrastructure approach to resilient shorelines. Further, research and reports highlight the shortage’s detrimental effects on the region’s ability to restoration habitats, and the Bay’s tidal marshes’ ability to keep pace with sea level rise.

To address the need for sediments, the Commission staff applied for and was awarded an Environmental Protection Agency Wetlands Program Development grant (EPA grant), and a subsequent Ocean Protection Council (OPC) grant. The “*New sediment management policies for wetland restoration and climate change resilience in San Francisco Bay*” grant proposes to address regional demands for reuse of sediment and soil in wetland restoration projects by (1) addressing regulatory and financial barriers to further wetland restoration success through a Results Chain Analysis, (2) a San Francisco Bay Plan amendment regarding sediment, and (3) a financing strategy. This three-phase project will occur over a three-year period and outcomes will build on the output from each phase. On March 17, 2022, the Commission voted to accept these funds and undertake the proposed work.

As part of these grants, the Commission staff is partnering with the SFEI/ASC, the SFBJV, and the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board (Water Board). The SFEI/ASC and the SFBJV are named and funded partners in the EPA grant, providing expertise, consultation, planning, and product and policy advice and review. The EPA grant and the OPC grant have specific funds set aside for the contributions of both SFEI/ASC and SFBJV, at \$30,000 and \$9,999 respectively. The SFBJV is also contributing staff time beyond the amount funded by these grants. The Water Board is contributing its staff time to this effort as well, specifically focused on the Results Chain Analysis and helping to prepare a Beneficial Reuse Road Map, but is not receiving grant funding.

The SFEI/ASC is one of California’s premier aquatic and ecosystem science institutes. Its mission is to provide scientific support and tools for decision-making and communication through collaborative efforts. They provide independent science to assess and improve the health of the waters, wetlands, wildlife and landscapes of San Francisco Bay, the California Delta and beyond. SFEI’s fifty scientists and experts provide data, technology and tools that empower government, civic and business leaders to create cost-effective solutions for complex environmental issues-- from cleaner water and sustainable communities to climate change. They have three primary programs: Clean Water, Resilient Landscapes, and Environmental Informatics. In this effort, the Commission staff will be working with SFEI/ASC’s Resilient Landscape Team which has done significant work on sediment management issues, including the Sediment for Survival Report, and currently hosts the Regional Monitoring Program’s Sediment Working Group.

The San Francisco Bay Joint Venture is a partnership established in 1996 working to protect, restore, increase, and enhance wetland habitat to the benefit of birds, fish, and other wildlife throughout the San Francisco Bay Region. They are a partnership program with a broad management board of agencies, non-profits, and industry representatives. Their small staff of three focuses on coordination of all wetland restoration projects in the Bay Area, and play a supporting role in policy advocacy, legislation, funding, and programming for other non-profits, agencies, and organizations in the wetland restoration community. Their fiscal sponsor and employer is the non-profit Point Blue Conservation Science. This unique organization has valuable insight into the region's restoration needs via its organizing and convening function for this community and speaks on behalf of this large and diverse group of restoration practitioners. They meet with the restoration community on a regularly basis, represent them at the state and federal level, and assist in prioritizing restoration activities regionally.

Staff Recommendation

The staff recommends that the Commission authorize the Executive Director to enter into two contracts, one with SFEI/ASC for \$30,000 to provide the Commission scientific expertise in the sediment science to support improved sediment management, and the other to the SFBJV for \$9,999 to provide restoration expertise, and policy support for the Sediment and Beneficial Reuse Project over the three-year grant program, from February 17, 2023 (or upon approval) through December 31, 2025. The staff further recommends that the Commission authorize the Executive Director to amend the contract as necessary, including revising the amount or duration of the agreement, so long as the amendment does not involve substantial changes to the services provided.