

Section 2: Assessment Review Process

Three agencies are responsible for implementing the Ecosystem Restoration Program (ERP) in coordination and along with oversight by the California Bay-Delta Authority; these are: the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). Collectively, these three agencies are called the Implementing Agencies for the ERP. The California Bay Delta Authority Act of 2003 defines implementing agencies as those agencies with the primary responsibility for carrying out the program elements.

This section describes the process used to review progress toward each milestone for this assessment package. The Implementing Agencies began the review process by looking at contracts issued through the CALFED ERP, Water Quality Program and Watershed Program as well as contracts issued through the Anadromous Fish Screen Program (AFRP) of the Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA). Information also was collected from key CALFED agencies' activities—not necessarily contracts—that contributed to the “single blueprint” concept for ecosystem restoration as these relate to making progress toward substantially implementing the milestones during Stage 1. Not all CALFED Program elements were reviewed comprehensively for this assessment package; programs not reviewed comprehensively were the Levee System Integrity, Storage, Drinking Water Quality, Water Use Efficiency, and Water Transfers programs. Activities of the Science and Conveyance programs were considered for the assessment package, however, a comprehensive review of contracts related to these programs have yet to take place.

The “Single Blueprint” concept for restoration and species recovery is to provide a unified and cooperative approach to restoration. The Single Blueprint helps ensure coordination and integration, not only within the CALFED Program, but between all resource management, conservation, and regulatory activities affecting the Bay-Delta system.

A wide range of activities are available to the Implementing Agencies and other agencies that contribute to making progress in the substantial implementation toward the milestones; many of those activities may not result in contracts for projects. Some of those activities include workshops, seminars and stakeholder meetings. In addition, information was collected during the process about programs or projects that are not CALFED agencies' activities but relate to the objective of making progress in substantially implementing the milestones. The Implementing Agencies will supplement this assessment package with additional information provided by stakeholders and the ERP Science Board during a 30-day input period following reinitiation of consultation.

For this section, as in this assessment package, the term “contract” is used inclusively, referring both to the actual contract itself as well as to the project the contract represents. More than 450 contracts were reviewed for this assessment: 416 ERP contracts from 1995-2003; 68 AFRP contracts from 2000-2003; and 83 Watershed Program contracts from 2001 and 2002.

Developing the Contract Evaluation Process

In November 2003 the Implementing Agencies developed an outline for the milestones assessment document which included expanding the knowledge base of activities that contributed to the “single blueprint” concept as it relates to the milestones. To accomplish this task, the Implementing Agencies decided to review ERP and CVPIA contracts; conduct verification from the field as to information in the contracts; and collect information regarding other activities. The process of documenting these efforts included: (1) listing the milestones, (2) listing the ERP and CVPIA contracts associated with each milestone, (3) determining progress toward each milestone, (4) determining what more was needed to meet each milestone, (5) identifying information gaps, (6) identifying the effects or contributions of non-CALFED Program efforts to the milestones, and (7) developing focus area targets for the remainder of Stage 1 (2005 through 2007).

To evaluate the milestones, the Implementing Agencies appointed a workgroup. The workgroup members determined they needed information that would:

- demonstrate the effort put forth on behalf of each milestone;
- be developed in a timely manner for the 2004 reinitiation of consultation;
- provide a paper trail that demonstrates the logic for subjective decisions;
- be conducive for cumulative effect evaluations; and
- be expandable for long term evaluations beyond that needed for the reinitiation of consultation.

Existing ERP documents were used to assist in the milestone evaluation planning process. One such document was the *ERP Project Evaluation Phase 2 Report (Look Back Exercise)*. The *Look Back Exercise* recommended processes adapted for the milestones evaluation. These processes included using multiple methods for project review, developing a continuous learning and review strategy, and developing and using a multilevel framework for measuring performance. Another document instrumental in developing the evaluation process was the unpublished draft *CALFED ERP Milestones: Parsing and Rationales document (Parsing Document)*. The *Parsing Document* was the result of an ERP Science Board (ERPSB) review of the milestones and its determination that many of the milestones were multi-issue and often listed a series of goals (not necessarily related) within each milestone. The ERPSB also recommended that the milestones be parsed based on milestone objectives and that the rationale and potential mechanisms for how the milestones would affect a listed species are provided.

The Implementing Agency workgroup developed a two-level approach for evaluating the milestones after reviewing their information needs and the recommendations regarding evaluation processes from both the *Look Back Exercise* and the *Parsing Document*. The first level—called the contract review—consists of reviewing contract files to assess whether the stated objectives and actions of the contract would help meet a milestone. The second level—called the verification from field personnel—consists of verifying that the contracted work is taking place or was completed, confirming the milestones linkages to contracts, and determining additional milestone linkages, if appropriate. The combined information from the contract review and verification from field personnel was used to assess how much more work may need to be done to attain a milestone. More information about each review step is provided in the following text.

Contract Review. There were three sequential tasks in the contract review: developing milestones questions, completing contract reviews, and listing project objectives and contract tasks. Critical to the completion of these tasks was the first step, developing the milestones questions.

Many of the milestones have more than one requirement, or aspect, and consequently addressed multiple topics and goals that could be broken down into several subcomponents. The workgroup used an approach similar to one in the *Parsing Document* and “broke down” a milestone into its subcomponents. Once this was done, those components were rephrased as questions used to review a CALFED Program or CVPIA contract and to help determine how much progress has been made toward meeting a milestone. For example, questions were by geographic region, specific requirements for each geographic area, or by topic area in those cases where a milestone reflected several goals. In anticipation of the verification from the field, contracts were sorted by ERP region; adjustments to the verification from the field process were made to address those instances when the milestone or contract covered more than one region (see *Verification from Field Personnel*, below).

In order to determine if a CALFED Program contract directly provided substantial implementation of a milestone or contributed to the progress toward substantially implementing a milestone, the workgroup reviewed 416 ERP contracts from 1995-2003; 68 AFRP contracts from 2000-2003; and 83 Watershed Program contracts from 2001 and 2002. The large number of files was challenging in itself, but the task also was complicated because over the years there were six contract management entities and each used different organizational techniques for collecting and organizing the information. Therefore the information did not necessarily correlate between contracts; in some cases, information desired for this assessment was not in the contract files.

The criteria used for the contract review included:

1. Only the original contract was reviewed. Contract amendments would be reviewed as part of the on-going assessment process.
2. Contributions towards milestones were based on the actual task items listed in the contract itself, not from the proposal.
3. If a contract was not available, the task list was taken from the proposal and this was noted on the review form.
4. If the project was a multi-phase project, the review noted which phase was covered by a specific contract.

An unexpected result of the contract review was the realization that many contracts contributed to progress in substantially implementing more than one milestone, or that only a portion of a contract contributed toward progress in substantially implementing a milestone. Not all contracts directly contributed to a milestone; many of those contracts are for public education and outreach designed to heighten awareness of the need for species protection and ecosystem restoration. Ultimately the public education and outreach could contribute indirectly to reaching the milestones as more people become aware of the CALFED Program’s restoration process and public support for its actions grows.

Verification from Field Personnel. Verification from field personnel primarily was used to confirm that contracted work had been or was being completed; substantiate the accuracy of the milestone linkages to contracted projects, as determined in the contract review; and determine additional milestone linkages to the contracted project, if any. A secondary outcome of the verification from field personnel was to get general information against which the contributions from the CALFED Program contracts could be assessed in terms of progressing toward substantially implementing the milestones.

Verification from field personnel was conducted by personal visits or telephone. Since this assessment package is the first in an on-going effort, future assessments will contain information from on-site, independent evaluations of projects; however, time constraints precluded including that level of information in this assessment package. Among those contacted were agency biologists and habitat restoration coordinators with region-specific knowledge of restoration activity and projects, including other integrated program activities such as AFRP. Most of the verifications from field personnel were completed without going directly to the contractor. No verification from field personnel was completed for those contracts that the contract review indicated did not address a milestone (e.g., educational or public outreach contracts).

There are many other non-CALFED agencies' activities that are helping in the progress toward substantially implementing the milestones. To the extent practicable, information about those programs was sought by examining written documents and through personal contacts with knowledgeable persons in the field and this information is included in the assessment. With information about other related programs and projects, the Implementing Agencies could make better decisions regarding how much more work needs to be done toward making progress in meeting a milestone.

A "verification from the field" form standardized the kinds of information that interviewers gathered, such as project status or consistency between milestones linkages derived during the contract review. Generally, verifications from field personnel were conducted on a regional basis, although some contracts crossed regional definitions and so were handled differently. The verification from field personnel was designed to use the interviewers' knowledge of the region and the milestones to obtain the following information:

1. List the status of the contract implementation or completion;
2. Verify the associated milestones and linkage rationale based on the contract review.
3. Discover and list potential contributions a contract may have to other milestones.
4. List non-CALFED agency activities that contribute to a milestone.

For each milestone, after the verification from field personnel was finished, a "roll-up summary sheet" was completed (see Appendix A). These sheets list the contract(s) or parts of a contract that contribute toward substantial implementation of the milestone, as well as the rationale for identifying the milestone linkages used by the contract and verification from the field reviews. Milestone summaries are based upon all the individual contract information describing actions taken to substantially implement the milestone.

Evaluation Process for the Environmental Water Account (EWA)

The agencies implementing the EWA (EWA Agencies) are the California Department of Water Resources (CDWR) and the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), referred to as the “Project Agencies”; and the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), the US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), referred to as the “Management Agencies.” A team of technical staff from these agencies developed the summary of EWA activities and the technical basis for those activities. This summary is intended to facilitate the re-initiation of Endangered Species Act (ESA) Section 7 consultation to evaluate the efficacy of the EWA (see Section 5). The summary includes information about the acquisition, management and uses of the EWA assets, evaluates outcomes relative to expectations in the Programmatic ROD, and describes adjustments made in response to circumstances encountered in the first three years. This summary covers EWA implementation in 2001 – 2003 because it is being completed prior to the conclusion of 2004 EWA operations. Supplemental information on 2004 implementation will be integrated into this assessment when the year ends and data from 2004 are compiled.