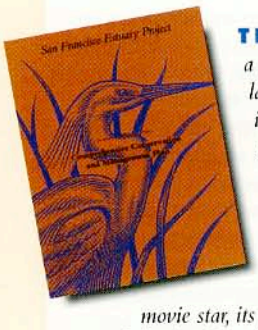
CCMP

10th Anniversary
years downstream
COMPREHENSIVE CONSERVATION & MANAGEMENT PLAN



TEN YEARS AGO

a thick brown "to do" list landed on desks and slid into mailboxes all around San Francisco Bay and the Delta. Though no trumpets sounded a fanfare, and the document's cover sported a blue heron rather than a blonde movie star, its publication was cause for quiet celebration. For the first time in the California water world—where industries, farmers, environmentalists, and government were more often at odds than evens over how to manage the region's waters, wetlands, and wildlife—100 people agreed on 145 things to do to preserve, enhance, and restore the estuarine ecosystem.

The 236 pages of the "CCMP," or Comprehensive Conservation & Management Plan for the Bay and Delta, was a first-of-its kind for Northern California. Those were the days when government didn't regularly invite stakeholders to the negotiating table, when science didn't always inform policy, when words like "watershed," and "restoration," and "adaptive management," and even "estuary" were still being looked up in the dictionary. Those were the days when we believed that fish could be saved with ladders and screens and hatcheries, that wetlands could be filled but recreated elsewhere, and that pollution could be stopped at the end of the pipe.

But in the five years and hundreds of hours of meetings it took to craft the CCMP, something changed. Those 100 people—brought together by the U.S. EPA's San Francisco Estuary Project and representing state and federal agencies, ports, fishing groups, oil industries, cities, birdwatchers, developers, rice farmers, hunters, open space advocates, Bay watchdogs, boaters, voters, and the like—launched a spirit of collaboration that permeates many of our environmental and water management programs today. That spirit, and the grander watershed-wide vision of the CCMP, now continues in dozens of programs and initiatives, including CALFED, the S.F. Bay Regional Monitoring Program, priority pollutant TMDL processes, the S.F. Bay Joint Venture, and the California Legacy Project, among others. Today in 2003, ten years since the CCMP was signed by Governor Pete Wilson and EPA Administrator Carol Browner, we look at its legacies.

Early Strides

Going through the process of crafting the CCMP broadened public involvement in Bay and Delta issues, educated many interests about the Estuary and its beneficial uses and environmental problems, and got participants thinking about how collaboration could benefit all parties rather than just be a compromise of individual goals.

According to U.S. EPA biologist Bruce Herbold, the CCMP gave stakeholders a unique forum for discussing public policies about endangered species, wetlands, dredging, pollution and other areas "openly"—not under the thumb of an arbitrating agency. Andy Gunther, who did early research on the Estuary Project's Status & Trends reports on dredging and pollutants agrees. "SFEP provided a new forum for all stakeholders—and we didn't even call them 'stakeholders' back then—to get together and seek common ground. The forum provided a chance for people to talk informally, as opposed to having to take the formal and often less flexible positions inspired by public hearings and workshops."

Says the S.F. Bay Conservation and Development Commission's Steve McAdam, "The CCMP was an organizing force and catalyst in what we were doing as Bay regulators as well as Bay enhancers. It provided a forum for the various state, local, and federal agencies to start talking and coordinating better. We made tremendous strides in reaching consensus on how to address nonpoint source pollution and undertake watershed planning."

More specifically, several very thorny issues got tackled through the CCMP: Bay dredging and its impacts on fish and Bay pollution; the lack of freshwater flows for fish and other aquatic resources; and the continued loss of wetlands to development. As the CCMP moved toward completion, new initiatives evolved to address these issues and carry on with conflict resolution post-CCMP.

On the dredging issue, ports, shoreline business, fisherfolk, and an array of government agencies worked together on a 50-year plan for management of Bay dredging and disposal, breaking a years-long stalemate. Although discussions about these conflicts had come up before the CCMP, says the Bay Planning Coalition's Ellen Johnck, it was the CCMP process that allowed them to progress and evolve into a comprehensive program to decrease in-Bay disposal, eliminate unnecessary dredging, minimize the environmental impacts of disposal, and increase beneficial reuse of dredged materials. By 2001, new federal and state policies were adopted implementing a long-term management strategy (LTMS) for dredging. "Working on the CCMP and LTMS created a whole new level of expectation for relationships and communication among institutions involved with dredging," says the Port of Oakland's Jim McGrath.

On the flows issue, CCMP stakeholders and staff brought the power of good science to the policymaking table—a tradition that has become the norm rather than the exception in Bay-Delta water management today. When CCMP stakeholders, researchers, and work groups first began looking into what flows might be needed to help fish and the ecosystem, just mentioning flows or flow standards was a "no no". Recalls EPA's Tim Vendlinski, "There was a time when people studying the Estuary were not allowed to study flows because it was too politically hot. Through the CCMP process, we set aside the politics." Vendlinski helped organize a workshop of top scientists to discuss what should be done on the flows front. The scientists proposed not a new flow standard, but a "salinity" standard, which sought to keep the two parts per thousand isohaline within a certain range of locations, near Suisun Bay, within which scientists had discovered a strong association with estuarine food productivity and native fish health. This was a radical new approach to flows issues.

That standard for managing the Estuary—known as "X2"—became one of the three pillars of the 1994 Bay Delta Accord, says Vendlinski. Many of those who had just been through the CCMP process contributed to the Accord, which sought to mediate the threat of stronger endangered species crackdowns at the pumps with a more ecosystem-based approach.

"Over time, scientists realized that unless they stepped in and tried to influence decision-making, systems and species were going to be lost," says Vendlinski. "We had scientists—extremely cautious people—who were willing to