GUIDANCE FOR THIN-LAYER SEDIMENT PLACEMENT AS A STRATEGY TO ENHANCE TIDAL MARSH RESILIENCE TO SEA-LEVEL RISE

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Consensus statement on thin-layer sediment placement in tidal marsh ecosystems ................................................................. 1
   Background ........................................................................................................................................ 1
   Appendix A ...................................................................................................................................... 4
   Endnotes ....................................................................................................................................... 4
   Appendix B ...................................................................................................................................... 8
      Glossary of terms ...................................................................................................................... 8
      Literature cited in this Glossary ............................................................................................. 8
   Appendix C ...................................................................................................................................... 9
   Case studies .................................................................................................................................. 9

Chapter 2: Thin-layer placement of sediment for tidal marsh resilience in the continental United States: a literature review ................................................................. 13
   Introduction .................................................................................................................................. 13
   Projects sorted by location: clockwise around the U.S. by state, starting in the Northeast .......... 14

Chapter 3: Guide to navigating the permitting process for thin-layer sediment placement projects in tidal marshes ................................................................. 21
   Step-by-step guide for permitting TLP projects ............................................................................ 21

Chapter 4: Recommended monitoring for thin-layer sediment placement projects in tidal marshes ................................................................. 25
   Introduction .................................................................................................................................. 25
   Temporal and spatial considerations for setting measurable objectives and monitoring .......... 26
      TLP objectives and monitoring ............................................................................................... 30
      Elevation .................................................................................................................................... 30
      Resilience to sea-level rise (SLR) .......................................................................................... 31
      Vegetation .................................................................................................................................. 31
      Hydrology and inundation ....................................................................................................... 32
      Ecological functions ................................................................................................................. 33
      Community engagement ......................................................................................................... 33
      Compliance ................................................................................................................................ 34
   References .................................................................................................................................... 34
   Example monitoring plans from select TLP case studies ............................................................. 35
GUIDE TO NAVIGATING THE PERMITTING PROCESS FOR THIN-LAYER SEDIMENT PLACEMENT PROJECTS IN TIDAL MARSHES

FOUNTAIN
Permitting large-scale thin-layer sediment placement (TLP) projects that involve wetland fill can be complex and challenging. It is not uncommon to have to obtain multiple permits, particularly if the project is in an area with county, regional, state and federal jurisdictions. Each agency has one or more laws that serve as the nexus for their jurisdiction, with different agencies often enforcing different sections of a law as is the case with the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. §1251 et seq. (1972)). In general, the laws that are most often triggered by TLP are in place to protect water, habitat, species, and cultural resources. While each project location will be unique and have distinct circumstances, federal laws will cover all projects in the United States.

**STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR PERMITTING TLP PROJECTS**

**Step 1 – Determine which permits are needed**

The first step in planning a large-scale TLP project is to determine which permits are needed. This is to ensure that as the next steps are worked through, the specific requirements of each applicable permit are being met. For example, marine mammal surveys would not be needed in step 3 if no marine mammals are present in the area. See the accompanying Permitting Table for a list of Federal and State permits likely needed for a large-scale TLP project. While California was used as a State example, other states are likely similar but could have other types of special districts or regulatory bodies with permitting oversight. Contact regional offices to check for updated permit requirements.

**Step 2 – Clarify project goals**

It is important at this step to have well-articulated project goals to provide clarity to funders on what is being attempted. It is standard practice to use SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely). This is a good time to engage the entire project team, including stakeholders, in reviewing and agreeing to project goals.

**Step 3 – Develop a clear picture of existing conditions**

The first step in determining the potential project impacts is to characterize the existing conditions with initial monitoring and assessments. This will include characterizing the extent of the project, current land use, and physical conditions and processes (such as topography and hydrology, sediment type, and impacts of sea-level rise). It will also include characterization of the existing habitat and species with special attention on both state and federally listed species. During this step it is important to review the guidelines from various permitting agencies and work with staff to ensure the proposed project is characterized relevant to permit needs.

**Step 4 – Design project and determine construction sequencing**

This step of the process will allow the project team to inform the design through setting ecological as well as physical parameters (e.g., a range of allowable elevations or a range of tidal creek densities). An important component is setting thresholds for ecological outcomes that may be translated into engineering designs. These parameters may be relatively simple such as setting minimum and maximum elevations, or may be more complex and include hydrologic modeling of water flow over the marsh and through tidal creeks. This is a good time to bring in experts in TLP and other aspects of tidal marsh restoration.

**Step 5 – Outline potential impacts**

Construction sequencing is important to think through and characterize in order to determine potential impacts when applying for permits. For example, different types of containment needed during larger-scale TLP projects will use different equipment (e.g., from hay bale containment of slurry to sheet pile containment of tidal channels), which may have varying temporal and spatial impacts. In general, this is also an opportunity to characterize equipment that will be needed and how the use of that equipment could impact the water, land, species or cultural resources of the site.

**Step 6 – Explore different mitigation measures**

Use best management practices to determine which mitigation measures are most appropriate to reduce the impact of your project to less than significant. For example, project timing may be changed to avoid nesting birds or pupping marine mammals (if applicable), biological surveys may be done to ensure no special status species are present, or water quality protection measures such as installing straw bales may be applied to protect against increased turbidity.
Step 7 – Establish a compliance monitoring plan

This is sometimes called a Mitigation, Monitoring and Reporting Plan (MMRP) and summarizes the permitting requirements in one document for use as a guide throughout the project.

While these guidelines are by no means exhaustive, the ultimate goal is to ensure that when TLP projects are considered, the permit hurdles are identified early on. As project leads get deeper into the planning process and contact regional agency offices through the links provided (see Permitting Table), a clearer picture will emerge on area-specific permits needed and any streamlined processes already in place to facilitate restoration projects.

<p>| OVERVIEW OF FEDERAL &amp; STATE NATURAL RESOURCE LAWS AND REGULATIONS THAT MAY BE APPLICABLE TO THIN-LAYER SEDIMENT PLACEMENT PROJECTS (USING CALIFORNIA AS THE STATE EXAMPLE)* |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| LAW                            | FEDERAL OR STATE | RESPONSIBLE AGENCY | IMPLEMENTING AGENCY | PERMIT, AUTHORIZATION, STUDY OR AGREEMENT | REGULATED ACTIVITY AND RESOURCE | ADDITIONAL INFORMATION |
| WATER                          | Federal         | State water board (EPA Oversight) | State or regional water board | Water Quality Certification | Discharges requiring a federal license or permit to comply with state or federal water quality standards | <a href="https://www.epa.gov/cwa-401/clean-water-act-section-401-state-certification-water-quality">https://www.epa.gov/cwa-401/clean-water-act-section-401-state-certification-water-quality</a> |
| Section 404, Clean Water Act (CWA) (33 USC 1344) | Federal | USACE (EPA oversight) | USACE | General Permit (Nationwide, Regional); Standard Permit (Individual); Letter of Permission | Discharge of dredge or fill material into waters of the U.S., including wetlands | <a href="http://www.usace.army.mil/Missions/CivilWorks/RegulatoryProgramandPermits.aspx">http://www.usace.army.mil/Missions/CivilWorks/RegulatoryProgramandPermits.aspx</a> |
| Section 10, Rivers and Harbors Act (RHA) (33 USC 403) | Federal | USACE | USACE | Section 10 Permit | Work in, under, or over a navigable waterway | <a href="http://www.usace.army.mil/Missions/CivilWorks/RegulatoryProgramandPermits.aspx">http://www.usace.army.mil/Missions/CivilWorks/RegulatoryProgramandPermits.aspx</a> |
| Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) (16 USC 1451) | Federal | USFWS / NMFS | USFWS / NMFS | Incidental Take / Biological Opinion (BO) (Section 7); Incidental Take Permit (Section 10) | Activities affecting species listed as threatened or endangered under the ESA | <a href="https://www.fws.gov/endangered/">https://www.fws.gov/endangered/</a> |
| Section 7 &amp; 10, Endangered Species Act (16 USC 1531-1544) | Federal | USFWS / NMFS | USFWS / NMFS | Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Consultation | Activities affecting eelgrass and other essential fish habitat | <a href="https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/habitat-conservation/consultations-essential-fish-habitat">https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/habitat-conservation/consultations-essential-fish-habitat</a> |
| Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA) (16 USC 1361 et. seq.) | Federal | USFWS / NMFS | USFWS / NMFS | | | |
| Section 305(b)(4)(A) of Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) | Federal | NMFS | NMFS | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LAW</th>
<th>FEDERAL OR STATE</th>
<th>RESPONSIBLE AGENCY</th>
<th>IMPLEMENTING AGENCY</th>
<th>PERMIT, AUTHORIZATION, STUDY OR AGREEMENT</th>
<th>REGULATED ACTIVITY AND RESOURCE</th>
<th>ADDITIONAL INFORMATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CULTURAL RESOURCES</td>
<td>National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (42 USC 4312)</td>
<td>Federal</td>
<td>CEQ and EPA oversight</td>
<td>Environmental Assessment (EA); Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI); Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)</td>
<td>Major federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment</td>
<td><a href="https://www.whitehouse.gov/ceq/">https://www.whitehouse.gov/ceq/</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>WATER</td>
<td>Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act (Division 7, California Water Code)</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>SWRCB</td>
<td>Waste Discharge Requirement (WDR)</td>
<td>Activities that may affect surface or groundwater quality</td>
<td><a href="http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/land_disposal/waste_discharge_requirements.shtml">http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/land_disposal/waste_discharge_requirements.shtml</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WATER/LAND</td>
<td>California Coastal Act (CCA) (PRC §30000 et. seq.)</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>CCC / BCDC</td>
<td>Coastal Development Permit (CDP)</td>
<td>Activities that modify land or water use in the coastal zone</td>
<td><a href="http://www.coastal.ca.gov/cdp/cdp-forms.html">http://www.coastal.ca.gov/cdp/cdp-forms.html</a> <a href="http://www.bcdc.ca.gov/forms/forms.html">http://www.bcdc.ca.gov/forms/forms.html</a></td>
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<td>SPECIES</td>
<td>California Endangered Species Act (CESA) (FGC § 2081 &amp; 2090)</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>CDFW</td>
<td>Incidental Take Permit (Section 2081) or Consistency Determination (Section 2080.1)</td>
<td>Activities affecting state-listed species</td>
<td><a href="http://www.dfg.ca.gov/habcon/cesa/">http://www.dfg.ca.gov/habcon/cesa/</a></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Section 1600-1616, California Fish and Game Code (FGC § 1602 et. seq.)</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>CDFW</td>
<td>Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreement</td>
<td>Activities that divert or obstruct the natural flow or substantially change the bed, bank or channel of a river, stream or lake, or use material from a streambed</td>
<td><a href="http://www.dfg.ca.gov/habcon/1600/">http://www.dfg.ca.gov/habcon/1600/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL</td>
<td></td>
<td>State</td>
<td>OPR and SCH (oversight)</td>
<td>Initial Study (IS); Negative Declaration (ND); Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND); Environmental Impact Report (EIR)</td>
<td>Discretionary actions proposed to be carried out or approved by California public agencies</td>
<td><a href="http://resources.ca.gov/ceqa/2019_CEQA_Handbook.html">http://resources.ca.gov/ceqa/2019_CEQA_Handbook.html</a> <a href="http://resources.ca.gov/ceqa/docs/2019_CEQA_Statutes_and_Guidelines.pdf">http://resources.ca.gov/ceqa/docs/2019_CEQA_Statutes_and_Guidelines.pdf</a></td>
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**ACRONYMS**

ACHP – Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
OCRM – Office of Ocean & Coastal Resource Management
BCDC – San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission
OPR – Office of Planning and Research
CCC – California Coastal Commission
RWQCB – Regional Water Quality Control Board
CDFW – California Department of Fish and Wildlife
SCH – State Clearinghouse
CEQ – Council on Environmental Quality
SHPO – State Historic Preservation Officer
EPA – Environmental Protection Agency
SWRCB – State Water Resources Control Board
NMFS – National Marine Fisheries Service
USACE – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
NOAA – National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration
USFWS – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

*Modified from a table developed for an Elkhorn Slough NERR Coastal Training Program Workshop in 2013 titled “Navigating the Rules for Environmental Compliance with Wetlands Restoration in Coastal California” with April Zohn, Lux Environmental.*