

**Suffolk County Vector Control and Wetlands Management
Long-Term Plan and Generic Environmental Impact Statement**

**Minutes of the Joint Steering Committee/Technical Advisory Committee Meeting
September 17, 2002
County Legislative Auditorium
Riverhead, NY**

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INTRODUCTION

- The meeting opened at approximately 10:15 a.m. with each person in attendance introducing himself or herself, with affiliations.
- The SCDHS quickly reviewed the materials that were provided in the information packet made available to meeting attendees, including summaries of the first meetings of the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC).
- The SCDHS indicated that suggestions for membership on the project committees were welcome.
- The project consultants, Cashin Associates and Cameron Engineering (CA/CE), distributed the task outline, which was used as the basis for the presentation.

TASK 1: Work Plan Refinement/GEIS Scoping

- This task is in progress, and is the subject of this meeting and all prior committee meetings.
- CA/CE indicated that this task should be completed by December 2002, which will allow the project to proceed with the technical tasks, 2 through 13, thereafter.

TASK 2: Laws, Regulations, and Management Programs

- NYSDEC questioned whether this task will also examine the Long Island Wetlands Initiative (which has involved NYSDOS and NYSDEC) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) wetlands restoration program. CA/CE responded that the list of programs given in the current Work Plan was not intended to be exhaustive, and that all relevant programs will be addressed under this task.

- At this point the SCDHS stated that written comments on the project scope were welcome, and reminded everyone that comments were due by September 25. Any written comments received by that date, as well as all oral comments made at today's meeting, will be taken into consideration in refining the project scope.

TASK 3: Literature Evaluation and Early Action Recommendations

- CA/CE explained the current and past positions, expertise, and roles of the project sub-consultants. The team provides local knowledge, as well as knowledge of mosquito control practices across the United States, including Florida and Texas.
- CA/CE anticipates that prior Environmental Impact Statements on mosquito control programs in the region (i.e., New York City and Westchester County) will serve as a substantial source of information that will be useful in developing Suffolk County's Long-Term Plan.
- The FWS questioned whether the study will address the effect of larvacides and non-target species; although the effect of adulticides on non-target species is included in the current scope, it was unclear to the FWS whether a similar assessment would be included for larvacides.
- The FWS also questioned whether the study will examine the full range of effects that the County's pesticide application program has on marsh birds, including the effect that repeated helicopter flights have in affecting bird behavior.

TASK 4: Suffolk County Vector Control, Existing Operations

- CA/CE noted that geo-referencing for the project will be ArcView -compatible.

TASK 5: Data Compilation

- Under this task, CA/CE will organize the data in terms of watersheds for surface water data, and also will cover groundwater. CA/CE will take a hard look at data sets available from NYSDEC and the USACE. The ultimate end product generated under this task will be a comprehensive GIS mapping system.
- NYSDEC made several points:
 - Many of the Towns in Suffolk County have defined wetlands that have not been mapped by either NYSDEC or the USACE.
 - The regulatory authority exercised by NYSDEC under the Protection of Waters program covers non-mapped wetlands, including stream channels.

- Some of the Towns (e.g., Southampton) have GIS wetlands mapping.
- The USACE has completed mapping of submerged aquatic vegetation as part of its reformulation effort for the south shore of Long Island.
- The Central Pine Barrens Commission also may have mapping that is useful for this project.
- NYSDEC indicated that its data regarding the location of threatened and endangered species is sensitive, and security issues are important in order to prevent unauthorized dissemination of these data.
- It was questioned how the project will handle pesticide application data on a site-specific basis. NYSDEC indicated that it has a detailed database for commercial applications, with precise locations identified. NYSDEC stated, however, that no data are available regarding non-commercial applications.
- NYSDEC noted that it has been performing an analysis, using aerial photography, of historical trends in the extent of intertidal marsh throughout the County. This analysis has shown a widespread decreases in the extent of intertidal marsh. NYSDEC recommended that the results of this analysis be included under Task 5.
- NYSDEC also noted that it has commenced a systematic re-mapping of tidal wetlands in Region 1.
- The CEQ posed the query: What is the question that is going to be answered by this report? Framing this question is important in order to focus the effort effectively under the various tasks.
- TNC is in the process of completing a compendium of GIS data for the Peconic Estuary, and will be proceeding with a similar project for the South Shore Estuary. This effort will identify the GIS data that are available and the organizations that maintain these data.
- A number of other data sets were identified which should be consulted under this task, including NYSDOS's Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitats and NOAA fishery areas.

TASK 6: Monitoring Program

- CA/CE briefly discussed the issue of continuing improvements in the sensitivity of detection techniques, which is allowing the detection of lower and lower levels of chemicals in the environment.
- Bio-monitoring was discussed as a key aspect in the development of a set of biological indicators to monitor the effects of the County's mosquito control program. It was noted that a

single set of County-wide biological indicators may not be feasible, given the basic differences that exist among the north shore, south shore and Peconic systems.

- NYSDEC indicated that it has forwarded a protocol to the County regarding bio-monitoring for fish. CA/CE has reviewed this protocol, and has questions. Further discussion on this particular issue was deferred.
- The EPA questioned whether bio-monitoring under this project would be conducted in residential areas. The SCDHS requested that the EPA forward a set of specific protocols and guidelines to be evaluated for relevance to the project.
- The SCDHS indicated that support for undertaking monitoring activities in Task 6 would be welcome from all organizations in the area, especially NYSDEC and the USACE.

TASK 7: Field Assessment and Mapping

- This task will involve review of the mapped wetlands identified under Task 5, using special screening criteria, in order to formulate a list of approximately 20 wetlands that will be subject to detailed study (called “Tier 1” wetlands in the current work plan). The screening criteria will be used to assess marsh functionality (i.e., to determine whether any given area constitutes a “successful marsh”). The 20 or so wetlands selected for detailed study will cover both tidal and freshwater wetlands (including recharge basins).
- As currently envisioned by CA/CE, the selection of “Tier 1” wetlands will include both unique marshes, as well as marshes that can be used as archetypes for the greater management plan.
- CA/CE welcomed input regarding the criteria that should be considered and weighting that should be applied in evaluating marshes for inclusion in the “Tier 1” analysis.
- The SCDHS stressed that Task 7 is critical to establishing a long-term monitoring program.
- The SCDHS pointed out that the task numbers in the work plan do not necessarily correlate to the order in which they will be undertaken. Given that Task 7 is complex and expansive, it is hoped that work on this task can be commenced soon.
- CA/CE further clarified the selection criteria for “Tier 1” marshes. In particular, it was specified that the investigation will focus on marshes where mosquito management is undertaken.
- CA/CE stated that the marsh management component of this project is linked to mosquito control. The SCDHS followed up that marsh management under this program is undertaken to minimize the use of pesticides and mitigate the public health threat. The CEQ indicated that these concepts are not clearly expressed in the current project documents, and that the link between marsh management and mosquito control should be more explicit.

- Sea Grant suggested that “Tier 1” marshes should focus on those areas which have mosquito problems. The County’s Vector Control Unit responded that this information is available and can be included in the evaluation. CA/CE pointed out that it also will be necessary to determine why some marshes do not have mosquito problems; therefore, “Tier 1” will include control sites which are not managed for mosquito abatement.
- The Vector Control Unit suggested that the “Tier 1” investigation take a pro-active approach, and include some marshes on the east end of Long Island that may not be subject to mosquito management at the present time but which may be incorporated into the program in the future as the local population increases over time.
- The CEQ suggested that the project address whether mosquito populations in marshes that have been sprayed repeatedly over time have developed resistance to the involved pesticides, such that higher and higher doses of the pesticides are required in order to be effective.

TASK 8: Impact Assessment

- CA/CE stated that the impact assessment will be performed for a no-mosquito-control scenario as an alternative, as well as for a series of action alternatives.
- CA/CE will be consulting closely with the Steering Committee and TAC to obtain input on Task 8.
- The CEQ expressed concern regarding the risk assessment component of the project, especially with respect to the assumptions that will be used.
- Concern also was expressed that this project may be used to justify the County’s current mosquito management practices. CA/CE stressed that this will be a very open process, which is needed to ensure the technical validity of the impact assessment. The SCDHS indicated that it would share this concern if the project were set up as an Environmental Impact Statement for a predetermined plan. That is why the “management plan” approach is being taken, whereby the County’s long-term management plan is being formulated as part of the process. Under the “management plan” structure, there will be considerable opportunity for input and interaction, and the end product will be developed through consensus-building.
- The use of the word “streamlined” in connection with the alternatives analysis also was questioned. CA/CE responded that “targeted” or “focused” may be a better descriptor, in that the intent is for the risk analysis to target or focus on those pathways that involve the greatest level of potential exposure and/or risk, and limit the amount of effort expended on those pathways that are determined to involve the lowest level of potential exposure and/or risk.
- The EPA questioned the meaning of the term “baseline condition” and the types of data that will

be relied upon. The EPA noted that some of the information is not publicly available. CA/CE responded that the baseline will be defined to the best extent that is supported by the available data. The baseline will consist of three stressors: 1) biological (disease), 2) chemical (pesticides), and 3) hydrologic (marsh management). CA/CE acknowledged that some of the data may be “fuzzy”. CA/CE will utilize local information to the extent available and, where feasible, relevant data from other areas to fill in the gaps.

- The EPA asked about the use of proprietary information that is not available to the public. CA/CE responded that the study will rely only on those data that can be obtained. However, certainties and uncertainties in the data sets will be clearly described. Ultimately, the County may have to move ahead with less-than-perfect information.
- The EPA suggested that: 1) water and environmental data be collected before pesticide application, followed by post-application monitoring, as part of a one-year study; and 2) registry of available products be evaluated as part of the study.

TASK 9: Management Alternatives

- CA/CE stated that this will be a qualitative assessment, rather than a quantitative ranking analysis.
- The CEQ stated that the County should more succinctly define the distinction between management for “public health” versus management for “nuisance” control. CA/CE indicated that the terms “public health” versus “nuisance” have not yet been defined, but that doing so is part of the program. The County Vector Control Unit pointed out that separating these two issues it is not clear-cut because all of the “nuisance” species of mosquitoes also are disease vectors.
- The FWS questioned whether spraying for nuisance issues may make it more difficult to control disease transmission later on, if spraying results in resistance in the target mosquito populations.

TASK 10: Management Plan Report

- CA/CE stated that this task will produce a manual of “best management practices”.
- CA/CE reviewed the list of possible management recommendations that were presented before the CEQ at the September 10 public scoping session.
- Further discussion transpired regarding the difference between “Tier 1” and “Tier 2” wetlands. CA/CE clarified that “Tier 1” pertains to those wetlands which will be subject to detailed investigation, while “Tier 2” comprises all other wetlands that may be subject to management under this program. The intent is for the lessons learned from the “Tier 1” analysis to be applied to the management of the “Tier 2” wetlands.

- “Tier 1” wetlands will be selected to provide a representative cross-section of marsh characteristics in Suffolk County. These wetlands will be geographically dispersed, and will include both *Spartina* and *Phragmites* marshes.
- The SCDHS stated that the TAC will be consulted in selecting the “Tier 1” marshes.
- In order to avoid the perception that there will be a two-tier investigation, it was suggested that the “Tier 1” marshes instead be called “primary study sites”.
- CA/CE reiterated that the marshes selected for study will be linked to mosquito control, but also likely will include some control sites.

TASK 11: Peer Review and Meetings

- The SCDHS identified the TAC as the main instrument for peer review. The project team will engage in interaction with the TAC, and others who will be involved in the peer review process, as the process moves forward.
- The CEQ indicated that many questions remain unresolved regarding the TAC and CAC. The SCDHS responded that the membership of these committees has not been finalized. The County is open to suggestions for individuals or organizations that may be appropriate for either committee, including outside experts for the TAC.
- It was questioned whether the “Sunshine” laws apply to the committee meetings for this project. The SCDHS responded that according to the County Attorney’s Office, these provisions do not apply. However, as with other management programs such as Estuary Programs, the County intends that all such meetings will be open to observation by the public.

TASK 12: Early Demonstration Projects

- It was stated that the specific demonstration projects that will be undertaken are not known at this time.

TASK 13: Public Education, Outreach and Involvement

- CA/CE stressed that the County takes public participation very seriously.
- Outreach will include the establishment of a distinct and separate web site for this project.
- The project team will strive to ensure that all information is clear and understandable to the general public.

- The FWS questioned whether comments actively will be sought from key constituencies (residents of the Shirley-Mastic area were identified as one example). The SCDHS responded that the CAC has a budget that is specifically targeted to this component of the project. The allocation of funds to the CAC for public outreach is based upon the Estuary Program model. The SCDHS further pointed out that the Estuary Program included public surveys, implemented through the CAC, which it is expected also will occur with the present project.
- The SCDHS reported that the CAC will have to prepare a work plan for utilizing its public outreach budget.
- The SCDHS indicated that the CAC will have a certain degree of autonomy. However, any written information developed by the CAC will have to be reviewed for accuracy before distribution.

TASK 14: Environmental Impact Statement

- CA/CE noted that preparation of the DEIS will commence early in the process, based on the task reports.
- In a typical EIS process, some significant issues arise only after the DEIS has been circulated for public review. Under the management plan format for this project, however, all such issues will have been addressed during the preceding tasks (2 through 13).
- The DEIS will evaluate the new long-term plan that evolves from Tasks 2 through 13, not the County's current mosquito management program.

Post-Presentation Discussion

- Upon the completion of CA/CA's presentation summarizing the individual project tasks, as well as associated commentary from meeting attendees, further discussion was held regarding various aspects of the project, described as follows.
- Suffolk County believes very strongly in the process that has been established for this project, including the committee structure, which previously was used successfully in the Estuary Program.
- The SCDHS stressed that the project structure has a lot of flexibility, and includes demonstration projects, which will expand upon the existing information base that can be obtained through the literature search (under Task 3). The demonstration aspect of the investigation was found to be critical to the success of the Estuary Program.
- The SCDHS stated that the project scope is subject to change, based on the input received at

the various meetings that will be held through the close of the scoping comment period.

- The EPA cited current nation-wide statistics for West Nile Virus (WNV) cases and deaths, and indicated that there now is concern that the blood supply has become infected with WNV. Based on these considerations, the EPA commended the timeliness of this program.
- The SCDHS issued a reminder that the deadline for comments regarding the scope of the DEIS is September 25, 2002, and that written comments should be submitted to the SCDHS.
- The SCDHS stated that no further meetings have yet been scheduled for the Steering Committee or the TAC. It is hoped that a regular meeting schedule will be established for these committees before the end of the year. It is anticipated that the Steering Committee will meet on approximately a quarterly basis, while the TAC will meet approximately every two months.
- A meeting of the CAC is scheduled for September 23, to consider possible comments on the scope of the DEIS before the close of the public comment period on September 25.
- The SCDHS anticipates that the revised scope for the DEIS will be circulated in October.
- The FWS questioned how the different committees will communicate with one another. The SCDHS responded that the Suffolk County Legislature has the final say on the SEQR process for the long-term plan, with input from the CEQ. The TAC and CAC each will nominate one representative to sit on the Steering Committee; this structure is based on the Estuary Program model.
- The FWS asked who is responsible for the form that the final management plan takes. The SCDHS stated that this is a consensus-driven process facilitated by the project consultants. However, ultimately the Suffolk County Legislature will be responsible for adopting the plan.
- The SCDHS stated that the currently-scheduled two-year time frame for completion of the project is optimistic, and may have to be expanded, depending on the final scope.
- The SCDHS asked NYSDEC about the prospects for streamlined, expedited approval process for an OMWM demonstration project. NYSDEC expressed its concern that OMWM is not the best approach to marsh management in all cases, although NYSDEC has issued approvals recently for some projects. NYSDEC urged the project team to consult closely with the Department's personnel involved in an ongoing assessment of historical trends in tidal wetland coverage.
- The SCDHS indicated that under the most optimistic schedule, the OMWM demonstration project would be initiated in the upcoming winter or early spring. The County currently is performing pre-project monitoring.

- Sea Grant indicated that it conducted an OMWM demonstration project at the Seatuck preserve. The results of that study, undertaken in the 1980s, could be useful for the present project.
- The FWS indicated that so-called OMWM projects previously executed on Long Island did not really address mosquito control. Those prior efforts were targeted primarily to controlling water levels. The County Vector Control Unit agreed with this assessment, and indicated that the intent of the current proposal would be to develop a true OMWM demonstration project directed at evaluating mosquito control.
- As a point of clarification, the CEQ indicated that its role is strictly in an advisory capacity to the Suffolk County Legislature.
- The Suffolk County Planning Department advised that Task 4 (Existing Operations) should commence as soon as possible, based on information in the County's Annual Plan and including other available information regarding historic mosquito control operations in Suffolk County.
- The meeting was closed at approximately 12:30 p.m.