

Founder Steve Ritchie Looks Back at Ten Years of the Regional Monitoring Program

As part of the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the RMP, the *RMP News* looks back at the RMP's origins. The following article is an excerpt from Steve Ritchie's 2003 RMP annual meeting address on how the RMP began and what future role the RMP should play in the science of the Estuary.

(Excerpts from Steve Ritchie's Address at the 2003 Annual Meeting)

Looking back at the origins of the RMP, it actually started about ten years before it officially began. Going back to the fall of 1985 when Roger James, my predecessor as the Water Board's Executive Officer, told me that we were going to have toxic pollutant standards in our Basin Plan. He didn't ask my opinion. I said: "O.K., let's go do it." We worked up the Basin Plan, which was adopted

by the Regional Board in late 1986 that included toxic pollutant standards in San Francisco Bay.

In spring of 1986, we realized that there were some unpublished data by Jim Kuwabara of the USGS on water column pollutant concentrations in San Francisco Bay - and that was it. There was nothing else. So we were going to have toxic pollutant standards and realistically didn't have a clue as to what the concentrations in the Bay were except for that

small set of data points. We went forward with the work, adopted the Basin Plan, which included standards that the US Congress later required nationally as part of the 1987 revisions of the Clean Water Act. The information base for the standards was woefully inadequate (both in terms of what

is good for the nation's waters and what is achievable). We have been struggling with those Clean Water Act amendments ever since. That struggle is now taking place in the TMDL process.

In June 1988, I became the Executive Officer of the Water Board still with the memory that we didn't know much about the Bay. I wanted to write a letter to all the dischargers using the Executive Officer's authority saying: "By god - you have to get out there and monitor for toxic pollutants in the main water mass of the Bay". Fortunately the staff, who was training me at that time, said it's a little premature to do that, since we really don't have the tools to do it all that well. It was Mike Carlin and Susan Anderson that talked me out of it at that time. I made it clear to them that their answer wasn't going to work for very long. We needed to have a monitoring program for the Bay.

The next milestone for me was a Friday afternoon call in April 1989 from Randy Kanouse, who was the Legislative Affairs manager for the State Water Resources Control Board saying 'Steve, we've got this bill that's going before the legislature that is going to be passed on Monday'. It was a bailout bill for the state Superfund program. They just stuck a rider on it for the Bay Protection and Toxic Cleanup Program (BPTCP), which had been an idea that someone had floated about five years before but hadn't gone anywhere in the legislature. It was the price for getting the bailout for the state Superfund program. It had substantial funding in it for understanding toxic hot spots in California's water bodies. I said: "Sounds good, Randy, I haven't got any ideas to add to what's in the bill already, let's go forward with it." So what we got with the



Steve Ritchie addresses the attendees of the 2003 RMP Annual Meeting

BPTCP was the seed funding to start to develop, in essence, the protocols and ideas that became the RMP.

Between 1989–1991, we used that seed funding to contract with UC Santa Cruz and some others to do the core work in establishing some of the methods for toxic pollutant sampling and analysis in the Bay. Now armed with something that said: "Here's what we want to do," in 1990 we started to meet with dischargers, and it was kind of bible-thumping time: "Guys we're going to get religion on this, and we are going to have a monitoring program in San Francisco Bay, and you are going to participate in it and you're going to help pay for it." Some of the dischargers said O.K., and some were a bit feisty about it, which led to the next milestone for me.

In Oct. 1990 my wife was in labor with our first child, and I was meeting with the BADA (now BACWA) board of directors, and everybody was whining about how we are going to do this and what is going to be the home for it. I basically said: "The Aquatic Habitat Institute (AHI) is an organization out there that we can use. It's a non-profit, and I've got to go, because my wife's about to give birth in a couple of minutes." So that's how the decision was made to go with AHI.

I remember in 1995, in one of my last meetings as Executive Officer, we were talking with the RMP Steering Committee about expanding the program to include fish tissue monitoring. We had done some pilot work on the issue, with Karen Taberski leading the way in 1993-1994. At the Steering Committee meeting, Don Freitas, a representative of the storm water agencies, expressed a position at that time on behalf of the storm water dischargers that "we are only concerned with what goes on in the creeks, we don't have anything to do with what goes on in the Bay." Frankly, I was speechless. I didn't know

what to say because it was so disconnected from my view of reality. On the other hand, given the status of funding of municipal governments, I completely understand how municipalities are going to feel that way unless there is a crying need to move forward on doing something different. I think that is one of the challenges before us all right now.

Looking forward, there are four basic points that I want to make about the RMP and science, and how we think about the Bay-Delta system. First of all, scientists complain about managers, and managers complain about scientists. The problem is the disconnect between scientists and managers. One of the things

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we constantly have to work on is making that connection. This takes a lot of effort on the part of managers and scientists. We have to force scientists and managers to meet at the table and stay at the table together and work at getting relevant information and using relevant information. That is the real key to the RMP and will continue to be the key over time.

Secondly, we need to look ahead to big things that are going to happen in the system and how the RMP will deal with them. There are many serious problems remaining. PCBs and mercury continue to be big issues. Looking ahead is what's important. What's going to be big in the Bay? Wetland restoration of salt ponds is evolving. What happens in the south Bay as a result of this is going to be very significant, and the RMP needs to be connected with that. Desalination for drinking water will also be an issue in the future. There is a stampede among water agencies toward desalination, because many other options are getting foreclosed. Desalination is being looked at in the Bay, and how we deal with intake

issues and discharge issues is going to be incredibly important, and I think the RMP is going to be very relevant to that. From my background in CALFED, the Bay is just the end of a huge system. The Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta restoration is going to be big for the next 30 years, and it's going to have an impact on the Bay. Once again the RMP needs to be connected to this; looking for how things will change in the Bay, not just discharge-related, but habitat restoration-related.

The level of investment will dictate the future path of the RMP. We set up the RMP originally by cutting back on a lot of monitoring requirements for dischargers, which basically meant

no net increase in terms of actual expenditures. The dischargers appreciated that. In the first year or two, Mike Carlin and I were thinking that

the program needs to get to the five million dollar level. Well, it has been at the three million dollar level for a long time. I am not sure that's an appropriate level of investment for our Bay. If we are looking forward to things that will be happening out there, we need to be creative about where the money comes from. The money won't come from Sacramento or Washington. Ultimately, the money needs to come from the Bay Area. The level of investment needs to reflect the degree to which we care about the Bay.

It took eight years to get the RMP going, and we have been at it for ten years now. We decided what to do, and kept after it religiously after that. We have a tremendous resource in the Bay, and I don't think we appreciate it as much as we should. We owe it to ourselves and to society, to understand it, manage it, and nourish it. That is a collective responsibility of all of us as managers and scientists: to make the Bay the best that it can be, and the RMP is a critical component of that. 