

Appendix A. Description of the Tidal Wetland Project Planning Process

An organizational framework was developed for the Tidal Wetland Project teams including the Strategic Planning Team, Science Panel, Working Groups, and for Community Input (Figure 32).

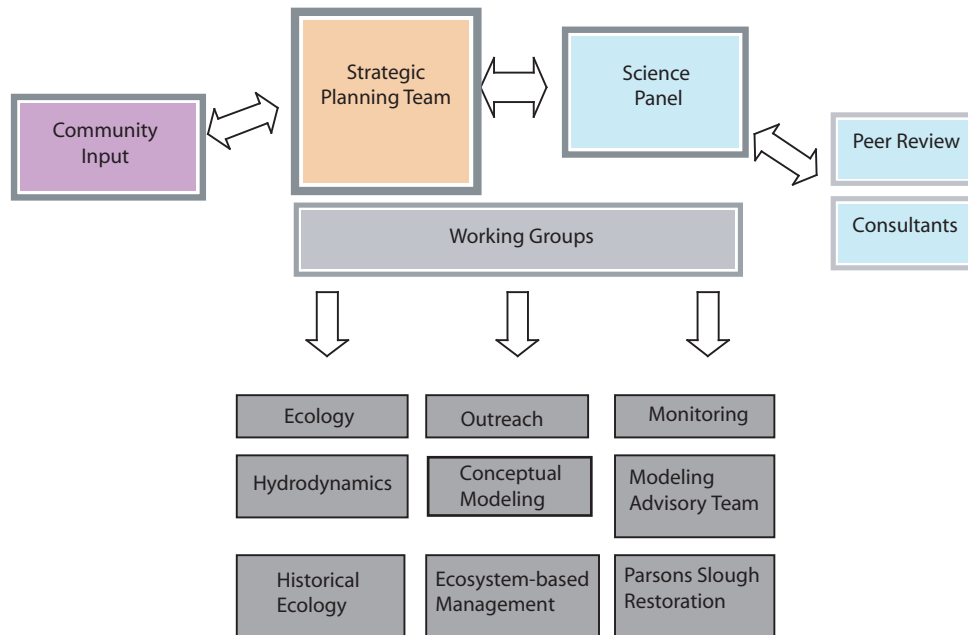


Figure 32. Diagram of Elkhorn Slough Tidal Wetland Project teams.

Community Involvement

Either a community forum or field tour has been hosted every six months of the planning process to bring Tidal Wetland Project-related information directly to the community and provide a venue for community members to share their observations about estuarine habitats. A contacts database has been created and updated that includes more than 850 people such as landowners, scientists, members of community organizations, and agency representatives interested in the conservation and restoration of Elkhorn Slough's estuarine habitats. Almost 300 of those contacts now receive monthly email updates about Tidal Wetland Project activities, and each month several new individuals request to be added to our email list. An additional 400 contacts receive mailed notifications of our upcoming forums and events. Several community forums and walking tours have been held to receive public input about potential restoration activities with approximately 120 attendees. Over 50 web pages accessible to the public have been developed about the Tidal Wetland Project with some outreach materials created for technical experts and others aimed at lay audiences. In addition, web forms are available for any members of the public to send in comments or questions at any time about the project.

Key Project Milestones

Twenty-four meetings of the collaborative Strategic Planning Team and Science Panel teams and community members have been held since 2004 involving hundreds of participants. Meeting agendas, summaries, and presentations are posted on the publicly accessible project website at <http://www.elkhornslough.org/tidalwetlandproject> as a record of discussions and decisions. A synopsis of the purpose and main outcomes of Tidal Wetland Project meetings can be found in Appendix B.

Restoration Planning Framework

The first step with any wetland restoration effort is to conduct a planning phase. The framework for the planning process was largely based on similar restoration planning efforts and National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration’s guidance on approaches to coastal restoration (Diefenderfer et al. 2003). The framework for the planning phase consisted of four main steps with the final outcome being a plan that would guide the implementation of restoration projects in Elkhorn Slough. The Strategic Planning Team provided revisions to draft planning frameworks and adopted the process shown in Figure 33.

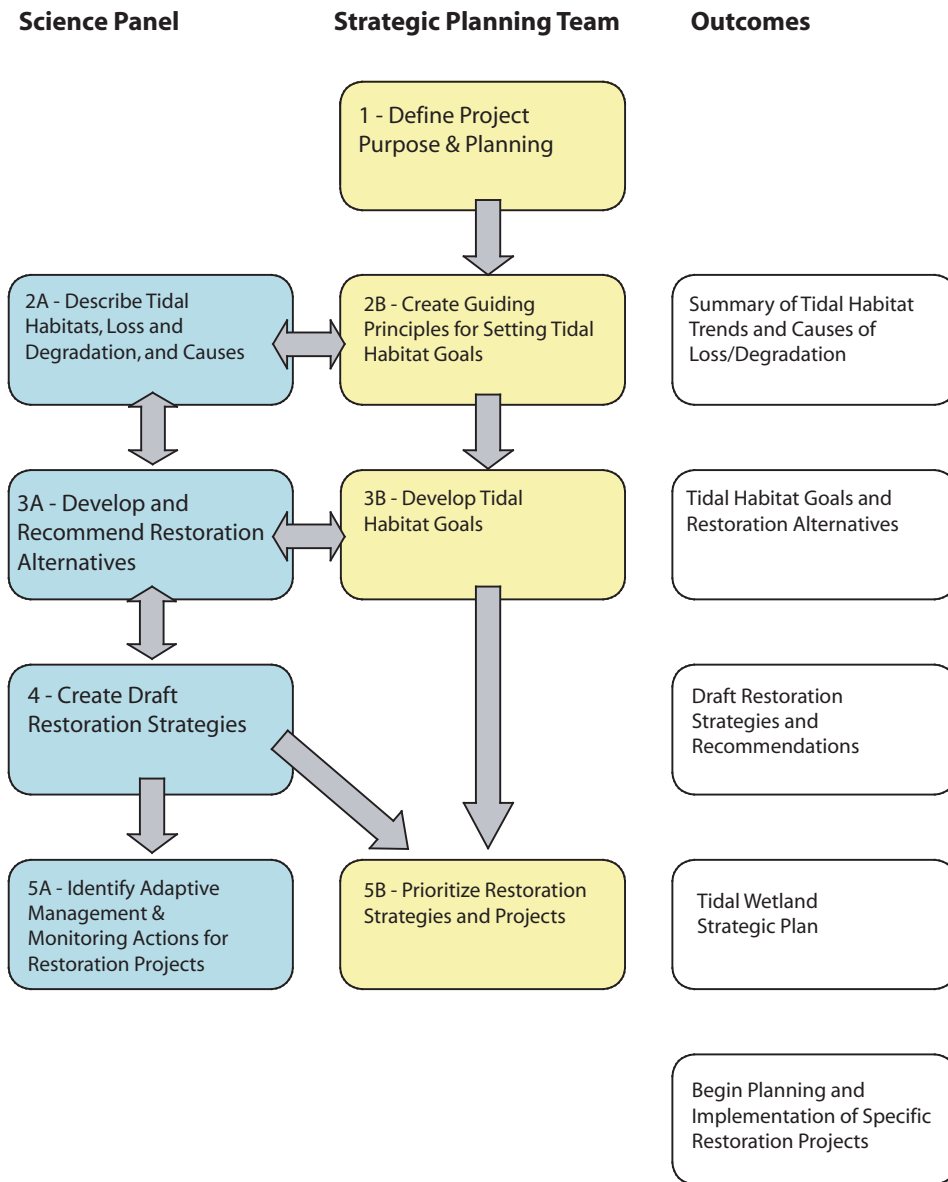


Figure 33. Elkhorn Slough Tidal Wetland Project restoration planning framework (2004).

Developing the Vision, Goals, and Objectives for Estuarine Habitats and Planning Principles

The main responsibility of the Strategic Planning Team (SPT) was to develop the vision, goals, and objectives for Elkhorn Slough estuarine habitats (See Chapter 1). The SPT has used consensus decision-making to find agreement during the restoration planning process. A document was created to outline the decision-making guidelines and provide alternatives to consensus if needed. Consensus agreement on a broad vision statement was a relatively straightforward process even with the diverse interests and agency missions of the SPT members. The vision statement placed importance on native estuarine communities because of the recognition that these ecosystems are ancient, rare, and historically and ecologically significant. The SPT also recognized that if the physical processes that support estuarine habitats were not in place, conservation and restoration efforts would not be successful. The third key component of the vision statement was the acknowledgment that healthy, sustainable estuarine habitats are valuable for people.

The SPT spent numerous hours deliberating the format of estuarine habitat goals and objectives. Many restoration planning efforts create maps or use percentages of habitats restored as goals. But unlike other systems, Elkhorn Slough is facing ongoing and rapid loss and degradation of estuarine habitats. Several team members compared what the estuary goals should be to an emergency triage situation – that the priority should be to investigate how to stop the hemorrhaging (continuing loss and degradation), implement those strategies, and then focus on other restoration efforts. Therefore, the idea of conserving existing habitats is a priority for Elkhorn Slough. The SPT decided that the goals and objectives should not be measurable at this time because it is currently unknown to what extent restoration efforts could stop or slow ongoing marsh loss and habitat erosion. Without further studies and analysis, setting quantified or spatial estuarine habitat goals was considered arbitrary.

During Tidal Wetland Project meetings, the SPT also discussed what time period could be used as a baseline for restoration efforts. The best maps and aerial photographs that show habitat type and extent dates back to 1870 and 1931, but neither date is considered a pristine condition for Elkhorn Slough because there were already many intensive human land uses in the watershed at that time. Also, researchers are just now embarking on more detailed investigations of historical habitat characterizations based on sediment core analysis. It is important to note that where the goals use the word “natural,” the intention of the SPT is to aim for an estuarine habitat composition before major alterations by European colonists. The SPT recognized, however, that because the entire estuary has been altered so drastically and large-scale processes have changed so much, it is unlikely that future efforts can fully return Elkhorn to historic conditions.

The Science Panel also participated in the development of goals for Elkhorn Slough estuarine habitats. The discussions mostly focused on whether it would be better to develop habitat goals or physical process goals. Many restoration projects use habitat goals, but because the processes that support estuarine habitats have been so altered, the Science Panel and SPT agreed that both types of goals were needed.

The SPT had a number of additional questions while developing the goals and objectives. For example, how will restoration efforts in Elkhorn Slough take into consideration listed (rare, threatened, endangered) species, human uses, or sea-level rise? To address these topics, the SPT created planning principles that members would keep in mind during the planning and implementation of future restoration projects. The planning principles are intended to be used in coordination with the vision, goals, and objectives statements.

Final Steps in the Planning Framework

The final tasks in the planning framework (Figure 33) were to; (1) develop and make recommendations about restoration alternatives and strategies, (2) identify adaptive management and monitoring actions for restoration projects, and (3) prioritize restoration strategies and projects. These items have been discussed in greater depth previously in this plan. The majority of planning efforts during 2005 centered on developing and evaluating potential large-scale restoration alternatives for estuarine habitats with ongoing marsh loss and habitat erosion. In 2006, significant project time was devoted to following up on SPT and Science Panel recommendations to secure funding for a technical analysis of potential large-scale restoration alternatives and detailed restoration planning for Parsons Slough. It was decided that projects would be designed to be adaptively managed and specific monitoring activities would be developed for each project to maximize the positive outcomes. Monitoring activities would also assess each project’s ability to meet overarching goals and objectives in addition to project specific outcomes. The final outcome of the planning phase is this *Tidal Wetland Strategic Plan* that will be used to guide the development and implementation of estuarine habitat restoration projects in Elkhorn Slough.