

RAMP vs. SAMI Questions & Answers

Q. Please provide a RAMP & SAMI 101, and the differences between the two.

A. Regional Advance Mitigation Planning (RAMP) 101:

A RAMP Work Group formed in the spring of 2008 to explore the potential for implementing regional advance mitigation in California. Work group participants include representatives from the California Department of Water Resources (DWR), California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration, California Department of Fish and Game, California Wildlife Conservation Board, California Department of Parks and Recreation, University of California, Davis, The Nature Conservancy and the Resources Legacy Fund. The large majority of the Work Group committed to working together on RAMP through a Memorandum of Understanding. The RAMP Work Group is currently developing a Statewide Framework document intended to convey to lawmakers and agency leaders the goals, benefits, and operational framework of a statewide RAMP initiative. The Statewide Framework will be completed in early 2011. The Statewide Framework will have a companion document, the RAMP Manual. The RAMP Manual will serve as a comprehensive guidance document for planning and implementing regional advance mitigation throughout California. Development of the RAMP Manual will draw from lessons learned during development and completion Regional Assessment for a pilot region in the Sacramento Valley. The assessment, which will be completed in 2011, will provide the 20-year strategy for implementing advance mitigation in the pilot region.

RAMP is really the comprehensive planning behind implementing advance mitigation projects for Caltrans and DWR; at this time, there is no funding provided directly to RAMP or to implement the Pilot Project or other advance mitigation projects. We are hoping that Caltrans will be successful in developing SAMI, explained more below, which could fund the RAMP Pilot Project or perhaps DWR will fund the Pilot Project through its available Proposition 1E funds (through 2016). Other infrastructure agencies such as High Speed Rail Authority (HSRA) could explore with Caltrans and DWR, the impacts of its line in regions that may be good candidates for future Regional Assessments. Also RAMP at this point is only for the Central Valley in areas where DWR and Caltrans have overlapping impacts. However, at some point it could be expanded statewide, but would need to include other infrastructure agencies and identify and secure a non-geographic-specific funding source for the planning.

A. Statewide Advance Mitigation Initiative (SAMI) 101:

SAMI is a Caltrans' proposal to develop an advance mitigation program with federal funds to provide the capital needed to provide compensatory mitigation needs in advance of project delivery through a RAMP model. Off-site biological mitigation for future projects could be estimated and a conservative portion of the estimate could be purchased in advance as part of a programmatic approach. SAMI could reduce project delays, reduce mitigation costs and improve mitigation quality. Caltrans and federal and state resource and regulatory agencies in the RAMP Work Group have prepared a MOU that ensures support for SAMI and a commitment to start developing a program. The purpose of the MOU is to establish a mutual framework for coordinated review concerning the development of SAMI in California by Caltrans and CDFG for advance mitigation of planned transportation projects at a landscape

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scale. SAMI may include establishment of mitigation and conservation banks, in-lieu fee programs, or other appropriate mitigation or conservation measures. The goal of SAMI is for it to be very flexible in order to meet Caltrans mitigation needs in advance of project delivery, and to provide an option for Caltrans to leverage funds for timely mitigation acquisitions. SAMI is planned to be a statewide program and could include other infrastructure agencies (such as HSRA) where project mitigation needs overlap.

Q. My understanding is that Caltrans and DWR are involved in both. Is that right?

A. No, Caltrans and DWR are both engaged in RAMP. At this point, SAMI only covers Caltrans transportation projects.

Q. How does SAMI & RAMP relate to each other?

A. RAMP as explained above currently includes two infrastructure agencies in the Workgroup. During the development of regional assessments, more infrastructure agencies (e.g. regional, county and city) may want to participate in the assessments, and benefit from the advance mitigation projects. At this point, the RAMP Workgroup is developing the Statewide Framework and started the development of the first Regional Assessment for the Pilot Project. Based on the Pilot Project Regional Assessment, the first 4-Year Action Plan, which identifies mitigation projects, will be completed.

SAMI once developed could fund the planning of future Regional Assessments and to fund one or more mitigation projects identified in 4-Year Action Plans through the RAMP program. SAMI funds could also be used to plan, develop and fund additional mitigation solutions outside the RAMP program.

Q. What are some of the benefits and drawbacks of each?

RAMP and SAMI are similar in their approach so they share many of the same benefits and drawbacks.

A. RAMP & SAMI - Benefits

- ▶ Improved collaboration between infrastructure funding agencies and natural resources agencies and better coordination between mitigation planning efforts and other conservation planning efforts.
- ▶ Mitigation planning that will be more proactive and less reactive, more systematic and less haphazard, multifunctional rather than single purpose, large scale rather than small scale, and better integrated with other planning efforts, resulting in larger scale, more meaningful and cost-effective conservation that advances statewide and regional environmental goals.

The RAMP Work Group has also identified numerous benefits that could result from implementing a regional advance mitigation planning program. These benefits could include:

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- ▶ lower mitigation costs and permit streamlining for the infrastructure funding agency;
- ▶ fewer permitting or regulatory delays resulting from the need for mitigation;
- ▶ greater ecological and financial predictability;
- ▶ mitigation site planning, management, and monitoring efficiencies;
- ▶ the ability to focus on large scale conservation in order to provide benefits to sensitive species through higher quality habitat, improved connectivity between habitat areas, and better long-term protection; and
- ▶ the ability to leverage and assist ongoing conservation efforts.

For an infrastructure agency, there could be some distinct advantages once RAMP and SAMI are fully implemented including:

- ▶ The infrastructure project may not have a related mitigation project, and as such will not be scrutinized for typical misconceptions about mitigation. This may allow to reduce the number of public comments that must be addressed and possibly avoid unnecessary lawsuits. In addition, CEQA & NEPA analysis and permits required for the mitigation project would already be completed.
- ▶ Fewer negotiations on the acceptability of the proposed mitigation during permit reviews, because the RAMP and SAMI credits are already approved. This will reduce project delays and help Caltrans deliver projects on schedule.
- ▶ A defined cost for mitigation will be available at the time the projects are being planned, helping Project Managers stay within their budget projections (fewer chances for a cost overrun so long as the amount of impact stays the same or less).
- ▶ Conservation priorities are already mapped out, so that infrastructure projects can be sited to avoid and minimize conflicts and sensitive resources.

Drawbacks

Advance mitigation is exactly that; we are looking at planned infrastructure projects up to twenty years in the future, and trying to determine the mitigation needs of those projects. Therefore, it can be planning rich and require more coordination and time to develop the advance mitigation projects in comparison to identifying a single project specific mitigation project, but the overall outcome should be “faster-better-cheaper.”

Also since RAMP is very “planning rich” with the twenty year regional assessments, and then based on the assessments 4-year Action Plans, which identify mitigation projects that will be constructed, it could lose some flexibility to meet any new or unique mitigation needs, and could take longer than just developing a project specific mitigation project. It also means that there will be more queries for the infrastructure projects being planned in order to allow for the planning to best estimate eventual mitigation needs.

In the short term, because the RAMP Workgroup is working on the first Pilot Regional Assessment, and there is no proof-of-concept pilot site, there are significant time delays to anyone needing a mitigation credit through RAMP. RAMP and SAMI can only provide planning services as budgets and staffing allow. Creating stand alone advance mitigation sites may allow for a single agency to have the credits they need faster than those created by

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RAMP and SAMI if the current pace is kept. This gap in timing will be significantly reduced however as more of the state begins to have RAMP or SAMI planning completed.

Q. If an infrastructure project has a very fast timeline, joining too large a team may have possible hurdles that could significantly slow down the project's efforts.

A. Yes, RAMP & SAMI are a new approach to advance mitigation; and for now, these efforts are not out in front of project delivery. For the next few years, if an infrastructure project has a tight timeline then participating in RAMP may not make sense. However, once RAMP sponsored sites (with or without SAMI funding) or SAMI funded mitigation sites are created, there may be excess credits available to an infrastructure project that was not part of the original planning and budgets. There is interest in creating enough flexibility in both RAMP and SAMI sites that new projects can use their credits so long as there is no detrimental impact to the original sponsors of the site.

In addition, if the agency is planning for proposed projects, participating in RAMP (areas where DWR, Caltrans and other infrastructure agency has overlapping impacts, at this point limited to the Central Valley) or SAMI (areas where Caltrans and other infrastructure agency has overlapping impacts - statewide) may be the most beneficial for the infrastructure agency.