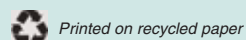




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The Morro Bay National Estuary Program is a local non-profit working to protect, preserve and restore the Morro Bay estuary and its watershed. The MBNEP is funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

“Turning the Tide” is a free quarterly newsletter. To subscribe, call the MBNEP office or visit our website.



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\$3 Million Awarded to New Morro Bay Study

This year marks the beginning of a new chapter in the scientific understanding and management of the Morro Bay watershed, estuary, and near shore ocean. Cal Poly has received \$3 million to lead a series of focused research efforts in and around the Morro Bay Estuary over the coming years.

Titled the ‘Morro Bay Ecosystem-Based Management Program’, the goal is to provide new scientific data needed by resource managers, and to build on current efforts of the MBNEP and others to foster collaboration and coordination between scientists, stakeholders, and the often fragmented missions and jurisdictions of the local, state and federal resource management agencies. The data and research that will be

produced by this program are critical to the MBNEP, as well as other decision makers of the Water Board, NOAA, the Department of Fish and Game, local governments, and to anyone affected by the decisions of these agencies.

Specific research areas include water quality, biological indicators of ecosystem health, socioeconomic indicators, critical spawning and nursery areas, and the balance between public access and resource protection in sensitive habitats.

The research planned by the Morro Bay Ecosystem-Based Management Program was developed by the very groups that need the information most: the MBNEP, the Marine Interests Group of San Luis Obispo County (MIG), and a diverse group of stakeholders

and resource management agencies.

Funding has come together from a broad range of sources: \$1.5 million from the Packard Foundation, \$719,000 from the Cal Poly Foundation, \$500,000 from the California Ocean Protection Council and Coastal Conservancy, and \$400,000 from the Resources Legacy Fund Foundation.

The concept of Ecosystem-Based Management was highlighted as a path to protecting our marine resources in the two recent landmark reports on US Ocean Conditions and Policy, the US Ocean Commission Report and the Pew.

For more information, you can contact Don Maruska at 772-4667.

Teacher Workshop a Success

Teachers that attended a recent Estuary Science Workshop called the event amazing, wonderful, and fun. Attendees at the two-day workshop received ready made lesson plans, classroom supplies, a copy of the “Living Estuary” movie, a tour of the salt marsh, and more. Plans are already in place to offer the workshop again in the fall of 2006. If you are a 4th or 5th grade teacher and would like to be notified of the next workshop call Cheryl Lesinski at 772-3834.



Wildlife Returning to Walter's Creek Restoration Site

Cooperative efforts between Cal Poly, the California Department of Fish & Game and the Morro Bay National Estuary Program are restoring habitat and giving wildlife a chance to return and thrive in the middle reaches of Walter's Creek.

Previous loss of riparian corridor vegetation along Walter's Creek made the site an ideal location for a MBNEP restoration project that began in spring of 2005. Once owned by Camp San Luis Obispo National Guard and used for military field maneuvers, the site is currently owned by Cal Poly, and used as grazing land for cattle.

Work has included help from the California Conservation Corps watershed crew that employed bank stabilization techniques to protect eroding creek banks and planted over

2,000 native tree seedlings of various species to re-establish a healthy riparian corridor.

Mike Hall, Beef Specialist for Cal Poly, developed a well-managed rotational grazing program, along with riparian fencing to protect the new plants from cattle until well-established. In the future, the area will be utilized as a riparian pasture, with limited, short-duration grazing to control invasive weed species.

But the most exciting result is how quickly living organisms are moving back into the area. While visiting a deep pool at the project site, Dave Highland, a Fish Habitat Biologist for the Dept. of Fish and Game, commented on how fast wildlife species are returning to Walter's Creek. "It's starting to look like a creek again." He pointed out the abundance of aquatic insects using the pools

for breeding habitat, a virtual population explosion. He looked pleased as he raised his hand from the pool and a mature dragon fly nymph crawled up his bare arm. "This one's about ready to emerge and take adult form."

Local predators are drawn to the site by a menu of ground squirrel and gopher. Each morning a coyote makes its rounds in the surrounding hills and a variety of raptors circle the skies above. The California Conservation Corps watershed crew has built and installed numerous bird houses for western blue birds, with barn owl nesting boxes soon to follow.

For more information about the project you can visit our website at www.mbnep.org and download past articles in the Summer and Winter 2005 *Turning the Tide* newsletters.

Calling All Birders for the Spring Shorebird Count in April

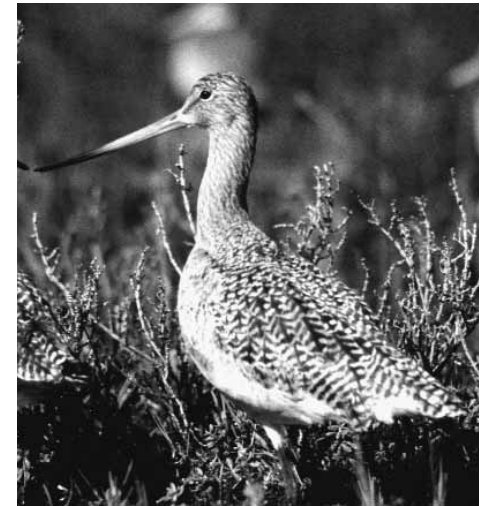
Break out those binoculars and spotting scopes and join other experienced birders for the Volunteer Monitoring Program's (VMP) spring shorebirding effort. The VMP is seeking volunteers with shorebird ID skills for a census on Saturday, April 15 from 8:30 am to noon.

Volunteers are needed to observe from land with spotting scopes, from kayaks and canoes on the water, and from the sandspit and Morro Strand between Morro Rock and Rocky Point (Northpoint). Under the coordination of the

Point Reyes Bird Observatory, shorebird surveys have been conducted in Morro Bay since 1988.

Collecting these data will provide a view of the variability of shorebird numbers seasonally and annually, with the overall goal of tracking long-term trends. Shorebirds are an important bio-indicator of the health of the bay and the Pacific Flyway migration route.

If you are interested in participating, contact Ann or Annie at 772-3834.



Over 2200 Marbled Godwits were counted last fall during the VMP's fall shorebird count. Godwits are most easily identified by the pink at the base of their slightly upturned bill. Each spring they migrate inland to breed on the Central Plains.

\$300,000 Has Been Dedicated to Cattle Exclusion Fencing Along Morro Bay Watershed Creeks

As part of a settlement agreement between the Regional Water Quality Control Board and the California Men's Colony, the MBNEP has received \$600,000 to restore and protect habitat in the Morro Bay watershed.

Half of these funds will be used to slow the filling of Morro Bay with sediment from the watershed. Erosion along creeks and drainages is a major source of sediment delivered to the bay via watershed creeks.

A pattern of damaging creek bank erosion is often started by grazing cattle wandering into

sensitive riparian areas looking for drinking water and shade. These large animals can quickly trample and eat creekside plants until only bare ground remains. A solution to this rangeland problem is to simply fence cattle out of the creeks and provide alternative drinking water sources.

With over 50% of the Morro Bay watershed functioning as rangeland, riparian fencing has the potential to greatly reduce sediment delivery to the bay. Fenced riparian areas and limited grazing lowers the impact from livestock, allowing for improved bank stabilization,

thus reducing soil erosion. Healthy riparian vegetation can also filter runoff from heavy rains, and trap excess nutrients and bacteria and pathogens before they enter the creeks.

The riparian fencing funds can be used to purchase and install fencing along creek corridors and install off-stream watering systems. Funding can not be used for cross fencing of pastures or development costs for new water sources (drilling wells). If you are an interested landowner, contact Mark Taylor, Watershed Restoration Coordinator at 772-3834 or mtaylor@mbnep.org.

Interpretive Signs Inform Curious Morro Bay Visitors

Colorful interpretive signs have recently been installed on two street end docks overlooking Morro Bay. The MBNEP signs are intended to help visitors discover the natural value and beauty of the Morro Bay Estuary.

The sign pictured here reveals the importance of eelgrass as an underwater habitat and fish spawning area. Healthy eelgrass beds grow just below the dock and each reader is invited to take an active look at this important submerged aquatic vegetation. A second sign introduces the estuary as a nursery of the sea, a bird highway and rare wetland filled ecosystem. Plans for additional signs are underway.

