

Estuary Program Partners and Stakeholders Meet to Set Priorities for Coming Years

Protecting and restoring the Morro Bay Estuary is a big job that has to be tackled one step at a time. How do we prioritize among the many issues and opportunities before us? The Morro Bay Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) provides the framework for this discussion, but it's critical to check in with the many Estuary Program partners to make sure we are focused on the highest priorities and most effective efforts.

This spring, Estuary Program staff and twenty key partners participated in a priority-setting discussion to help guide Estuary Program work over the next three years. All Executive and Implementation Committee members were invited to attend this special meeting.

The discussion was focused on the seven priority problems identified in the Comprehensive Conservation

and Management Plan for Morro Bay. The goals of the effort were to exchange ideas and information about the current status, challenges, and opportunities related to each priority issue, and to prioritize among them.

At the close, each participant was asked how they would allocate finite resources (\$15) across the range of issues, with the condition that no more than \$9 could be assigned to any one issue. The results are presented to the right.

Sedimentation and Habitat Loss stand out as the top two priorities, with over 50% of total resources allocated among these two issues. There is no dramatic break among the remaining issues, but Nutrients and Bacteria clearly ranked higher than Toxics and Freshwater Flow, while Steelhead Trout fall in the middle of this second tier.

This important prioritization effort, along with the specific comments and ideas captured in the afternoon's discussion, will serve as important guides for Estuary Program staff and partners, will be incorporated into upcoming Estuary Program work plans, and will be used by the Program's Committees as they review grant applications.

Sedimentation	27%
Habitat Loss	25%
Nutrient Overloading	13%
Bacterial Pollution	11%
Steelhead Trout	9%
Freshwater Flow	8%
Toxics/Metals	7%
TOTAL	100%

Estuary Program Reaches Out to Central Valley Youth



More than 100 second-grade students from Strathmore in Tulare County enjoyed a field trip to explore the beach thanks to the Coastal Commission's Whale Tail License Plate Program. The students in the photo to the left are taking a break from their beach clean-up to learn about sand crabs with Cheryl Lesinski, Outreach Coordinator for the Estuary Program.

You can help fund marine education programs for underserved youth throughout California by purchasing a Whale Tail license plate. To register for a Whale Tail license plate or learn more about this program visit www.coast4u.org.

New Volunteers Needed to Help Detect Hidden Sources of Water Pollution as Part of *Urban Watch*

Stormdrains are a part of urban life and in the past most people didn't give these common drainage systems a second thought. But stormdrains are now getting a lot of attention because, along with doing their job of preventing flooding by quickly transporting rain water out of our neighborhoods, they can also transport a variety of dangerous pollutants to natural waterways including creeks, bays and the ocean.

A majority of stormdrains in Morro Bay and Los Osos flow directly into the Morro Bay Estuary. Everything that stormwater carries with it goes down the drain and flows, untreated, into the bay. This "urban runoff" contains harmful pollutants including significant amounts of household chemicals, fertilizers, sediment and other pollutants that are washed off of yards, streets, driveways and other urban surfaces.

Only rain should go down stormdrains, and during the dry season consistent flow into these neighborhood drains is usually a sign of over watering or illegal discharge. To tackle this potential problem and improve the health of the estuary, the Morro Bay Volunteer Monitoring Program (VMP) is starting a new program, called *Urban Watch*, to address hidden sources of pollution. And they need your help.

The VMP's *Urban Watch* program is based on a successful effort by the Coastal Watershed Council as part of stormwater management programs in the Monterey Bay area.

The effort, started in 1997, serves as a tool for education and outreach to the community about the positive impact citizens can have on local water quality. The programs also provide important water quality data to support environmental management decisions.



The VMP needs volunteers to patrol a set of chosen stormdrains on a weekly basis in Los Osos and Morro Bay. If runoff is detected, volunteers make observations and conduct analysis using simple test kits. The effort requires approximately two hours each month, from June through October. **If you'd like to join the effort, please contact the VMP staff at 805-772-3834.**

Marine Protected Areas in the Morro Bay Estuary

The Morro Bay Estuary is now part of a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) stretching from Pigeon Point in Northern Santa Cruz County to Point Conception in Santa Barbara County. The final MPAs were approved by the Fish and Game Commission on April 13, 2007, after a two year process of stakeholder meetings led by a Blue Ribbon Panel.

The Central Coast was the pilot region for this effort and a similar process is now expanding to other coastal areas in California.

In the Morro Bay Estuary, the new designations have two main effects:

- Commercial harvest of marine resources (fish and invertebrates) is now prohibited in the Estuary, with the exception of the existing oyster mariculture.
- Recreational fishing and invertebrate collection is now prohibited south of Pasadena Point in Baywood. Similar restrictions are also applied to the State Park controlled property in the eastern portion of the estuary, providing an

additional layer of protection to the existing State Park regulations

Recreational fishing will continue under regular Fish and Game regulations in the remainder of the estuary, and waterfowl hunting is unaffected by the designations.

For detailed maps and descriptions of the Morro Bay designations as well as the larger network of MPA's, go to www.dfg.ca.gov/mrd/mlpa/ccmpas.html

Estuary Program Creates New Stormwater Pollution Ad Campaign

The Estuary Program has undertaken an ad campaign to educate Central Coast residents about the many sources of water pollution that can impact the health of both humans and wildlife.



The new television and radio ads ran throughout May and June. The star of the ad is a flock of rubber duckies that, with light-hearted humor, reveal how pollution sources (including dog waste, trash, and oil leaked from autos) can travel into coastal neighborhood stormdrains and flow, untreated, to the ocean. Beach going children, surfers and families are surrounded by rubber duckies that serve as a

visual representation of harmful water pollution that travels from land to ocean via urban runoff.

If you missed this catchy ad, you can view it at www.mbnep.org. The ads will run again this fall at the start of the rainy season. **If you would like to make a donation towards this campaign**, call Cheryl Lesinski, Outreach Coordinator, at 805-772-3834.

SLOSEA Website Worth a Look

The San Luis Obispo Science and Ecosystem Alliance (SLOSEA) is a new organization made up of an integrated group of scientists, stakeholders and managers in the Morro Bay Ecosystem including the watershed, estuary, harbor and coastal ocean. This exciting new group's primary goal is to develop and share high quality information to improve understanding of the ecosystem, and to employ this knowledge to facilitate conservation, restoration and sustainable use of the ecosystem. To learn about their completed and upcoming research visit www.slosea.org.

Morro Bay Stormdrains Get a Makeover

Morro Bay stormdrains got a makeover this spring when a dozen community volunteers turned out to help mark more than 300 drains with special plaques.

The plaques remind people that their neighborhood stormdrains empty directly into the Morro Bay Estuary



and ocean. Each year a handful of uninformed people dump paint, oil, cement or drywall waste into local stormdrains. Such dumping is illegal and harmful to humans and wildlife.

The new plaques send a clear message in both English and Spanish that “no dumping” is allowed. The colorful “new-school” markers (shown to the right) replace an older method of stenciling a message onto stormdrains. The colorful new disks are being used throughout the County, including San Luis Obispo, Avila Beach, Nipomo and, now, Morro Bay.

This pollution prevention event was an Eagle Scout project for Morro Bay resident Tyler Fraser (pictured to the left). Tyler teamed up with



the Morro Bay National Estuary Program and the City of Morro Bay to implement his project, protect water quality, and the health of wildlife and people alike.

If you find you have a stormdrain in your neighborhood that still needs to be marked with a disk, call Cheryl Lesinski at the Estuary Program at 805-772-3834. For more information about how to help reduce water pollution and project the estuary, visit www.mbnep.org.

How Does the Health of the Morro Bay Estuary Compare with Other National Estuaries?

As part of the 20th Anniversary of the National Estuary Program (NEP), answers to this question are available in a newly released document titled NEP Coastal Conditions Report. The report presents a broad baseline picture of the condition of NEP estuaries, along with additional information about the specific conditions and challenges of each NEP estuary.

The information-packed document reports on data collected in 1997-2003 by EPA's National Coastal Assessment program, but also takes into account data collected by individual NEPs on a variety of site-

specific indicators. The four primary indices of estuarine condition are examined including: 1) Water Quality, 2) Sediment, 3) Benthic (bottom dwelling) Invertebrate Population, and 4) Fish Tissue Contaminant Levels.

The report also presents data gaps and other issues that environmental managers focus on to make more reliable assessments. Together, this information paints a picture of the overall condition of the coastal resources of the NEP estuaries.

The overall condition of NEP estuaries is rated as fair with regional

scores as follows:

Puerto Rico & Northeast: Poor
Gulf Coast & West Coast: Fair
Southeast Coast: Good to fair

Morro Bay received an overall rating of good with the following breakdown:

Water Quality: Good
Sediment: Fair
Benthic Invertebrates: N/A
Fish Contamination: Good

To view the report in its entirety or the Morro Bay data only, visit www.epa.gov/owow/oceans/nepccr/index.html.



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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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