

Turning the Tide

A NEWSLETTER of the MORRO BAY NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

SPRING 2011

Update Underway for Estuary Management Plan



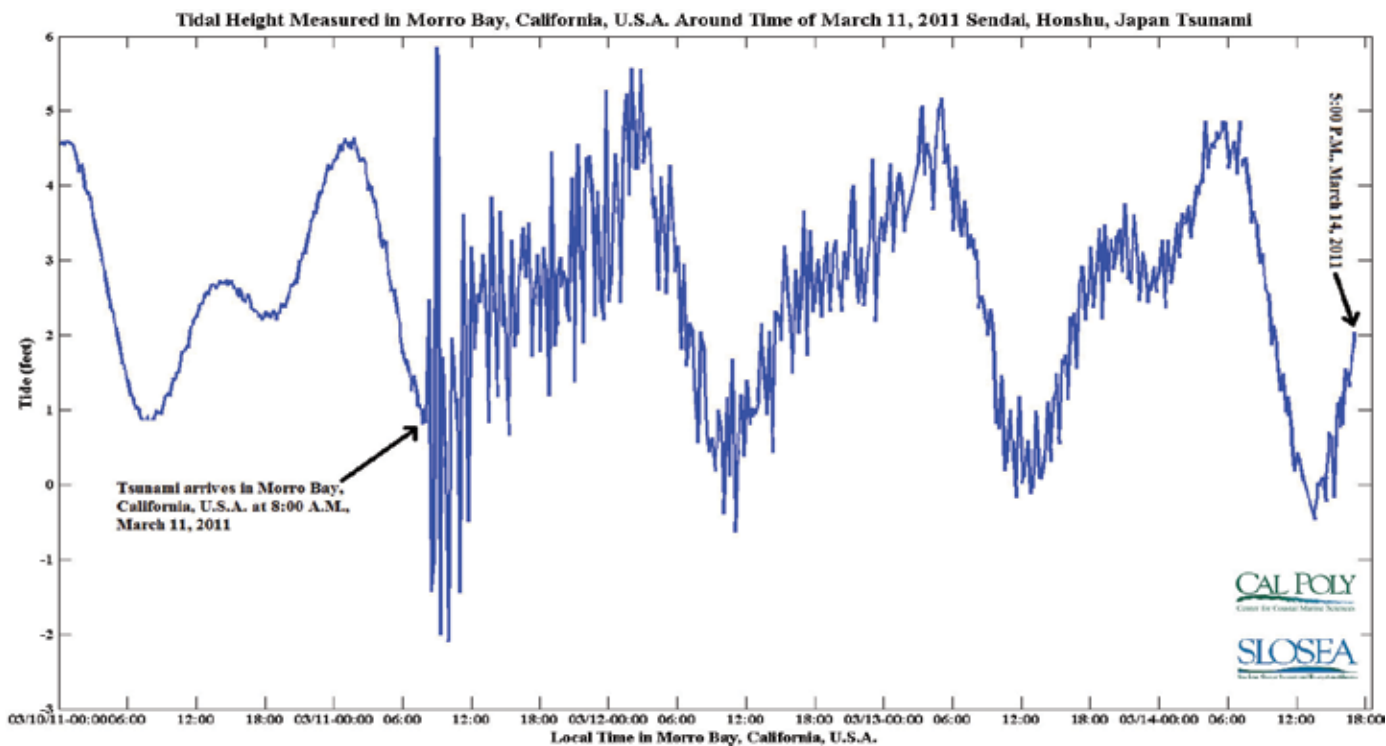
Mike Multari led the public meeting on April 14th to gather public input.

The Estuary Program, in conjunction with our many partners, has worked hard to restore, protect and conserve the estuary and its watershed since our beginning in 1995. Each successful restoration project, monitoring effort and educational campaign is rooted in the management plan, known as the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan or CCMP. That plan, a watershed-based, grassroots effort, was approved through the state of CA and the EPA more than 10 years ago. However, despite the forward-thinking efforts of the community and the plan's developers, new issues have emerged during 10 years of implementation that require

Please see **CCMP** on page 3

Visualizing a Morro Bay Tsunami

The figure below, from the San Luis Obispo Science and Ecosystem Alliance (SLOSEA), provides a simple, graphic way to see what was going on in Morro Bay during the March 11 tsunami. The plot below shows tidal height in the bay during the time period when tsunami waves reached our shores.

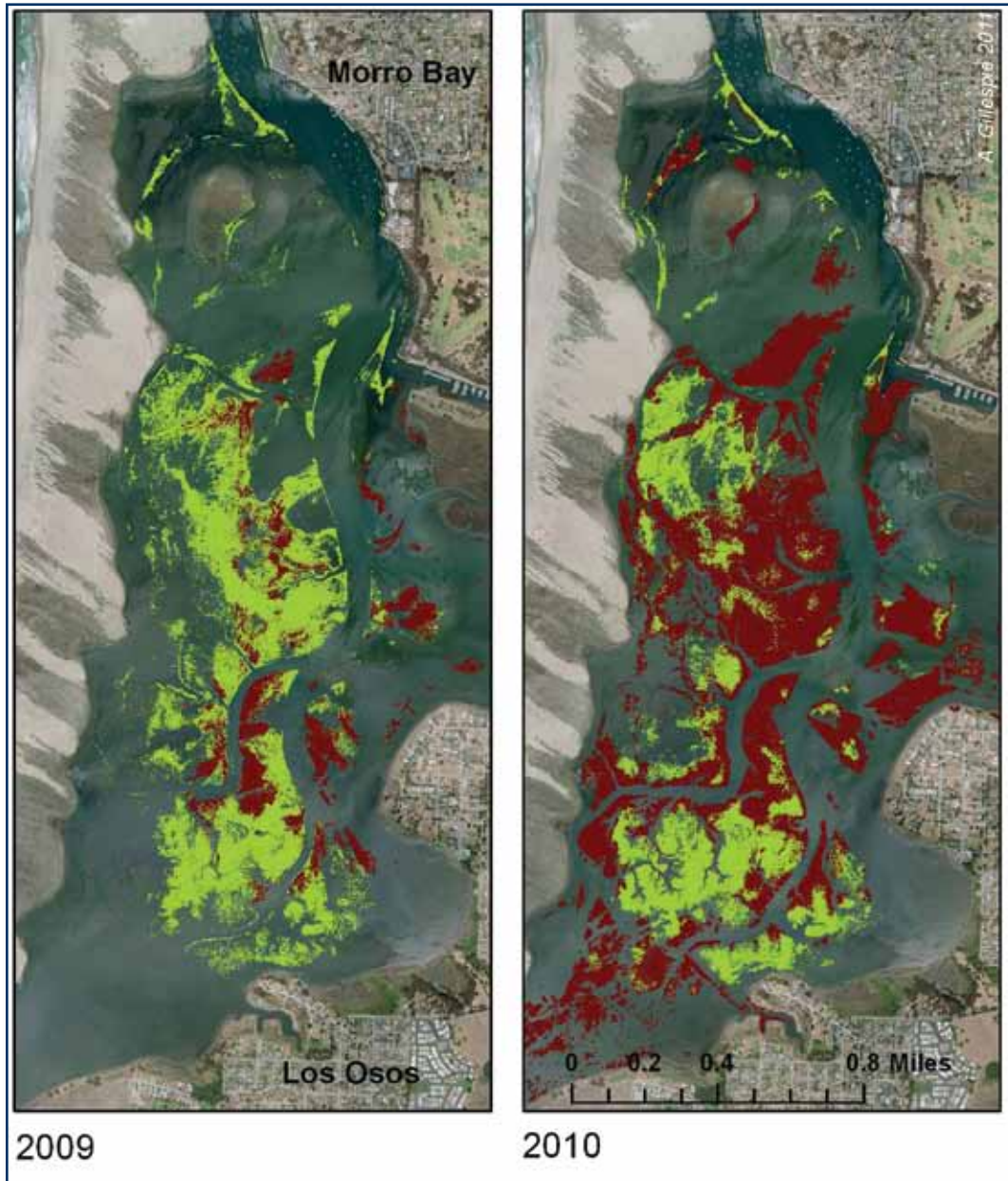


SLOSEA works with local water quality regulators and resource managers to understand the ecosystem in Morro Bay. To aid this effort, SLOSEA has established water quality monitoring stations in Morro Bay that contribute data to water quality and climate change

models. The information collected by these stations also captured the effects of the tsunami on Morro Bay. The stations also allow SLOSEA to provide live water quality data to the public at <http://slosea.org/about/dash.php>.

Graph courtesy of B. Zelenke @ SLOSEA/ Cal Poly Center for Coastal Marine Sciences

Eelgrass Shows a Decline in Morro Bay



The Estuary Program conducted an aerial survey of the Morro Bay eelgrass beds in the fall of 2010. The purpose of the survey was to map intertidal eelgrass beds and examine changes in distribution following the stormy winter in 2009. The results of the mapping effort revealed a 26% decline in eelgrass acreage between the fall of 2009 and 2010. Interestingly, the mapping also indicated substantial and widespread growth of *Gracilaria* sp. algae in Morro Bay. Program staff will be working with researchers from Cal Poly and other entities over the next few months to better understand changes in the bay, and what actions may need to be taken.



Grants Awarded for Community and Partner Projects

The Estuary Program recently funded four community projects totalling \$58,840 in grant awards.

An award for **Educational Tide Books** (\$1,000) will develop and produce tide books for State Parks outlets. Tide books will include species identification as well as information on how best to minimize visitor impact on tide pools and mud flats.

El Moro Elfin Forest Mutt Mitt Program (\$2,340) received funds to replenish stock on seven mutt mitt dispensers within the Elfin Forest while developing a community sponsorship program to provide future support.

2011 Western Snowy Plover Management for Montaña de Oro State Park Sandspit (\$30,000) CA State Parks received funding to monitor the Western Snowy Plover, and to protect their habitat on the sandspit for one of the largest nesting populations of the federally threatened species.

Controlling Cape Ivy and Other Invasive Plants in Chorro Creek at Camp SLO (\$25,500) will help with eradication efforts of the vine, Cape Ivy (*Delairea odorata*), an invasive species that chokes out native riparian vegetation.

WSP Program Provides Opportunity for Community Restoration Effort

The AmeriCorps Watershed Stewards Project (WSP) involves members in a wide variety of watershed assessment, restoration and conservation projects by placing individuals in organizations committed to preserving and restoring California's watersheds and native salmon runs. Working under the guidance of a natural resource professional, WSP members teach watershed and fisheries-based curriculum to K-12 students, participate in community outreach events, and receive high quality training in natural resources and professional development topics while assisting placement sites with their projects.

The program, now in its 17th year, has been very active in northern California. The Estuary Program, in conjunction with the California Conservation Corps, Central Coast Salmon Enhancement, and the Land Conservancy of SLO, hosted three WSP members for the first year that the program has been in place this far south.

An important part of the WSP program includes direct watershed restoration work. One such project, led by WSP member Megan Dolson through the Estuary Program, seeks to involve community volunteers to help stabilize an eroding gully that is depositing sediment into Walters Creek.

The Estuary Program has worked on several projects to restore segments of the creek in order to control sediment flow into the estuary. Last December's heavy rains caused a deep gully to form along the left bank of the creek. An effort to restore the site, planned for June 4, will provide an opportunity for community members to participate, hands-on, in the restoration effort.



WSP member Megan Dolson assesses the gully at Walters Creek

For information or to sign up to help, call the Estuary Program at 772-3834, visit www.mbnep.org or email Megan.Dolson@CCC.CA.GOV.

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updating the plan.

The CCMP prioritizes the work to be done in the watershed, outlining the ecological resources in the region. The central portion of the plan describes specific actions to address the priority problems. These actions are the core of the Estuary Program's efforts – every project completed and every grant funded must support at least one of these actions.

The update is designed as a revision of the current plan, preserving the plan's strengths. Efforts will focus on identifying any new issues facing the estuary and watershed that were not adequately addressed ten years ago. It will also update actions that are out-of-date or do not reflect the best solutions now available, and make the plan easier to read and easier to use. The results from the April 14th meeting show that public support continues to be strong for many actions identified in the management plan, including land acquisition, maintaining adequate freshwater flow for a healthy estuary, and continued work on Los Osos drainage improvements. Participants expressed interest in a number of additional issues facing the estuary, such as understanding climate change impacts and how

to adapt to them, the role of domestic and wild animal bacteria input into the bay, and renewed support of a boat haul-out facility in Morro Bay.

After consulting with technical experts through a series of working groups open to the public, a second general public meeting will be held in late summer or early fall of 2011 to gather further public input and feedback. All meeting times and locations will be posted on the CCMP update webpage as they are scheduled: <http://www.mbnep.org/ccmp/plan-progress-update.php>. Interested parties can also sign up for the CCMP update mailing list by emailing staff@mbnep.org to receive meeting notices, updates and other relevant information.

The Estuary Program strongly encourages you to share your thoughts at the next public meeting, through our facebook page (follow the link at www.mbnep.org), and by email (staff@mbnep.org). You can also speak to Lexie Bell at (805) 772-3834, ext. 16 with your opinions on priority issues facing the estuary and watershed with an emphasis on new or emerging issues.

Only with your input and ideas can we succeed in addressing the challenges and opportunities facing the Morro Bay watershed. Please join us at our next public meeting this summer.

Statewide Conference Held in SLO

San Luis Obispo hosted the annual, statewide Salmonid Restoration Federation conference in March. Estuary Program staff led a tour of projects throughout the watershed and presented volunteer monitoring data at sessions throughout the main conference.



Above, Restoration Ecologist Anna Halligan talks to a group about restoration efforts and monitoring within the watershed at Dairy Creek in El Chorro Regional Park. Photo by Jacob Pounds

Support Estuary Program Efforts!

Your generous donation protects and preserves the Morro Bay Estuary and watershed all year long by directly supporting MBNEP projects and programs.

Visit www.mbnep.org/get-involved/donate.php to support the Estuary Program.

We're going paperless!

In an effort to conserve precious resources, the Estuary Program will be shifting to an electronic-only newsletter. Summer 2011 will be our last paper issue.

We recognize that a small number of subscribers do not have access equipment necessary for electronic access to the newsletter so we will continue to produce a very limited number of paper copies as long as we are able. Please be sure to call the Estuary Program with your name, mailing address and a telephone number to sign up for the mailed copy, even if you are currently receiving a mailed copy.



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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.

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