

Turning the TIDE

The Newsletter of the Morro Bay National Estuary Program

Winter 2012

Our First Estuary Photo Contest—Winners Announced!



Photo © Cameron Tucker



Photo © Scott Mather



Photo © Cameron Tucker

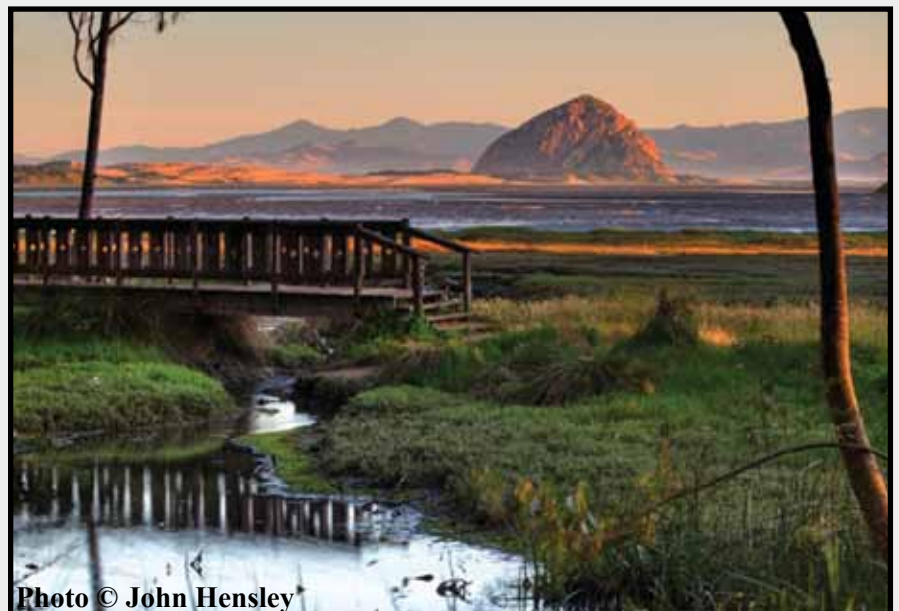
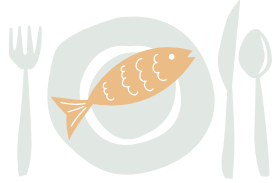


Photo © John Hensley

Like Seafood? — One More Reason to Buy Locally

From the Director's Desk

Eating locally-produced food supports local businesses while helping consumers feel confident that their food was grown and processed sustainably. It is easy to know your eggs are free range when buying them from your neighbor. The same is true for seafood.



Globally, over 1 billion people depend on seafood for a healthy diet. However, many of the fisheries the world depends on are under severe harvest pressure and not well regulated. According to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization, globally approximately 75% of wild marine fish are either fully-exploited or overfished. In the U.S., we have some of the strictest fishing regulations and enforcement in the world in order to protect this important food source, good reason to buy American.

Did you know that our small harbor in Morro Bay is on the forefront of fisheries conservation in the U.S.? As a result of an innovative partnership between Morro Bay fishermen, the city, and the

Nature Conservancy, a variety of sustainability measures have been instituted since 2007. The community has worked to implement a number of best management practices, including diversifying gear types used and testing new gear designs to minimize habitat impacts. The group has also created a risk pool and new collaborative information sharing techniques in order to avoid sensitive fish populations, harvest abundant stocks, protect the ocean, and keep local seafood on our tables.

Currently, using a grant from the Nature Conservancy, the city of Morro Bay is leading an effort to form a Community Fishing Association to anchor historical groundfish landings on the Central Coast and focus on the triple bottom line to achieve social, economic, and environmental benefits through local stewardship. This innovation in our own community is showcasing for other U.S. communities how to ensure environmental sustainability measures are met while protecting our fishing heritage.

For those of you who love fresh seafood, I encourage you to buy locally from the

docks and markets in Morro Bay. If you want to dig your fork into sustainable fish, here are some tips for making smart buying decisions – (1) request fresh, local seafood at restaurants and markets, (2) carry a wallet seafood guide (or download the app) to know which species to avoid when local options aren't available, and (3) ask questions (What species is it? Where and how was it caught?) and expect definitive answers. And remember, it is easier to get complete information about the product from your neighbor, the local fisherman.

Find out more...

Find facts on U.S. fish at www.nmfs.noaa.gov/fishwatch

Local seafood information at facesofcaliforniafishing.com

Download the Seafood Watch Pocket Guide or smart phone app at www.montereybayaquarium.org/cr/seafoodwatch.aspx



Support the Morro Bay National Estuary Program in its efforts to protect and restore our beautiful and unique estuary and watershed. You can donate by sending a check to the address below or by visiting our website and clicking on the "Donate" button.

Your donations directly support projects like those highlighted in this newsletter!



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Morro Bay Estuary Photo Contest

The Estuary Program recently held our first photo contest. Photographers were invited to enter images in any of four categories—Bay, Watershed, Wildlife and People.

Photographers from throughout the state submitted beautiful images, making selecting a top shot in each category a true challenge.

"Sense of Water" Contest

The US EPA has opened applications for the 6th annual Rachel Carson "Sense of Wonder" contest. In honor of the 40th anniversary of the Clean Water Act, the contest will focus on a "Sense of Water."

Deadline for entries is June 1, 2012. For more information, visit www.epa.gov/aging/resources/thesenseofwonder/index.html

Winning images in each category can be seen on the cover of this newsletter as well as on the home page of our website at www.mbnep.org. Watch for the images to appear in an upcoming issue of The Bay News too!

Thank you to all who entered, and to Tolosa Press for supporting the contest.

IMAGES FROM THE COVER...

Cameron Tucker (Top left)
Winner 'People' category

Scott Mather (Top right)
Winner 'Wildlife' category

John Hensley (Bottom right)
Winner 'Bay' category

Cameron Tucker (Bottom left)
Winner 'Watershed' category

Wrapping Up a Restoration Effort

Regular readers of *Turning the Tide* have been reading updates on the restoration effort at Walters Creek since the project started. 2011 saw completion of the monitoring phase of the effort, effectively marking the project's completion.

Estuary Program staff had developed a three-year strategy to maintain and monitor both the physical and biological responses to the restoration work, battling non-native species, irrigating propagated plants, and addressing minor repairs. The completely re-engineered creek channel provided a 'blank slate' to re-establish native riparian plant communities as well as improve fish passage and capture fine sediment before it makes its way to the estuary.

Preliminary results look promising. Plant cover has changed from mostly non-native, weed species to native plant communities which should provide shade and stabilize banks. Monitoring efforts have provided CA Dept. of Fish and Game managers with their first bird



Photo © Alan Schmierer

The blue grosbeak, above, is dependent on riparian habitat. In California, populations have been reportedly declining due to habitat loss. Monitoring at Walters Creek revealed blue grosbeak breeding activity at the site.

inventory data set, which will be helpful when making management decisions. The planted vegetation is growing at an average of 2 feet per year. The hope is that once established, more biological and physical trends will become apparent.

It takes a long time for a restoration site to mature, so monitoring will now be

scaled back to a five-year regime, providing a comprehensive data set that enables Program staff to address the goals of the project and to provide insight into future habitat protection and adaptive management projects.

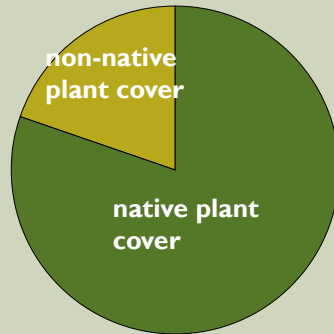
PROJECT OVERVIEW

Surrounded by grassland pastures, Walters Creek is also home to an active shooting range. The US government seized the ranchland in 1942, drastically modified the landscape and used it for military training during both World War 2 and the Korean War. Over fifty years later, undersized culverts were collapsing into the stream, the stream channel had severely eroded, unexploded ordinance littered the area, and the site was overrun by non-native vegetation.

In 2007, the Program began an effort to restore habitat and ecological function for aquatic and terrestrial species native to the area. Removing failing culverts and berms, re-establishing a more natural creek path, connecting the channel with its natural floodplain and replanting with native species were the first steps to return the region to pre-military conditions. A subsequent three year maintenance and monitoring period, concluding in 2011, has brought the site to the stage at which it can now naturalize with minimal human interference.

Monitoring Result Highlights

- 1) 81 avian species were identified on site, accounting for 18% of all the avian species detected in San Luis Obispo County as of November 2010 (Morro Coast Audubon)
- 2) Monitored plots showed a majority of native plant cover: 79% native and 19% non-native as illustrated in graph at right



2011 Morro Bay Christmas Bird Count Highlights

from Tom Edell, Count Compiler

The 58th Morro Bay Christmas Bird Count was held on December 17, 2011. Beautiful weather throughout the day had a positive effect on the number of species and birds recorded. Ninety-two participants were divided into 44 parties to cover the 15-mile diameter count circle. The area includes all of Morro Bay and most of the Morro Bay watershed.

This year's count of 52,455 birds, compared to the averages over the past 30 years, was higher by 4,404. The total

of 201 species was also higher by three species. In addition, three more species were seen during count week, but not on count day. White-faced Ibis was new to the count this year. The count's cumulative species total (1948-2010) now stands at 313 species.

The most notable species this year (recorded on 10 counts or less since 1980) were Long-tailed Duck, Red-necked Grebe, Bald Eagle, Elegant Tern, Black Skimmer, Marbled Murrelet, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Common Raven, Palm Warbler, American Redstart, Great-

tailed Grackle, Hooded Oriole, and Bullock's Oriole.

Other rarities of note were Eurasian Wigeon, Cassin's Kingbird, Nashville Warbler, Hermit Warbler, and White-throated Sparrow. Interesting subspecies reported were two "yellow-shafted" Northern Flickers and eastern "red" Fox Sparrow.

Complete count details will be available along with the previous count results at birds.audubon.org/data-research.

Goings On at the Estuary Program

Website Facelift

We've redesigned our website!



If you haven't already visited the new version of the site, be sure to check it out at www.mbnep.org

Reports Online

Interested in what the Estuary Program has been up to in 2011? Check out the highlights in our just-released 2011 Annual Report. Visit www.mbnep.org/library to download a copy.



Also go online to read the recently published *Morro Bay Sediment Loading Update*. Find the report at www.mbnep.org/Library/data_summaries.html



CCMP

Please join us on March 6, 2012 from 6-8 p.m. at the Morro Bay Community Center for the third and last public meeting regarding the Estuary Program's management plan update.

A draft of the plan will be available about

March 6

a week prior to the meeting on the Estuary Program's website at www.mbnep.org/Library/ccmp_meetings.html.

We will be taking public comment at the meeting. You will also be able to submit written comments through April 13. Details will be posted online with the draft. We need your input to make this plan as effective as possible in conserving our beautiful estuary!



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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.