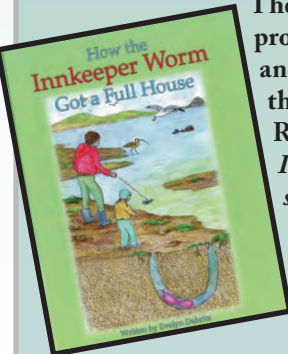


Community Grants Program

The Estuary Program awards funding for community-based projects that implement the Morro Bay Conservation Plan, and engage stakeholders, citizens and other organizations in the effort to protect and restore the estuary.

Recent grants helped publish the childrens' books *How the Innkeeper Worm Got a Full House*, at left, and *Kelp Condo Crisis* which teach families about special species that call the bay home. Another grant provided funding to remove and responsibly dispose of vessels that threatened to sink and contaminate the estuary, like the Restless C II, at right.



Invasive Species Action Plan

As global trade and travel increase, new species are being intentionally and unintentionally transported all over the world. These biological invasions are harming biological diversity worldwide. They threaten our environment, economy and human health. On the central coast we are experiencing this firsthand. From the invasive South African veldt grass taking over rare habitat in Los Osos to the invasive pikeminnow impacting our native steelhead trout, we are facing an



Yellow star thistle is one of the problem plants that will be addressed

onslaught of foreign invaders. To tackle these tough challenges, the Estuary Program and our partners are creating an Invasive Species Action Plan to combat this problem. The plan addresses key points of invasion by focusing on Prevention, Early Detection, Rapid Response, and Control & Management. For information on the progress of this important effort, visit www.mbnep.org.

Keeping a Finger on the Pulse

Tracking oxygen levels in the creeks, measuring bacteria levels in the bay, monitoring bay eelgrass beds – these and many other metrics serve as indicators of the health of the estuary and its watershed. Environmental monitoring increases our understanding of the connection between the land and the sea and the effect of human actions on these complex systems. The Estuary Program established a Volunteer Monitoring Program to support monitoring in the Morro Bay watershed. These citizen monitors come from all walks of life and each brings a unique

perspective and set of skills to the program. Their tasks vary from collecting measurements from local creeks to conducting detailed lab work to peering through a microscope at tiny plankton. To learn more about the monitoring program efforts and to see volunteer-generated data, visit www.mbnep.org and click on the Volunteer link.



How healthy is the Morro Bay Estuary?

Conditions are stable in Morro Bay, however the estuary faces significant challenges to its health

Although Morro Bay faces fewer environmental challenges than many ecosystems, there is room for improvement, and ongoing efforts to protect and restore the estuary are critical to its continued health.

The eight indicator questions presented in this report, when examined individually and then assessed as a whole, indicate that conditions are mostly stable in Morro Bay. However, the estuary faces serious challenges in several areas:

- Steelhead, a central coast threatened species, face degraded habitat, passage barriers and other challenges to their survival.
- Bacteria levels in creeks and the bay are not consistently safe for swimming.
- Unnaturally rapid sedimentation threatens to accelerate salt marsh expansion while decreasing other important estuarine habitats.
- Habitat of all kinds, and the species dependent upon them, face continued threats from increased development here and throughout migratorial pathways.
- New concerns about emerging contaminants and climate change will require some new indicator questions and further study.



Significant changes have taken place in the estuary and its watershed over the last decade. As development continues to occur in both Chorro and Los Osos valleys and human impacts from other land uses accumulate, we run a very real risk of harming this extraordinary place. The Estuary Program continues to monitor these indicators of environmental health and take action on those findings. With help from the community, future reports hope to show greater improvements to the health of the estuary.

What Is the Morro Bay National Estuary Program?



The Morro Bay National Estuary Program (known locally as the Estuary Program) is a local cooperative non-profit working to protect and restore the physical, biological, economic and recreational resources of the Morro Bay Estuary.

In 1995, Morro Bay was recognized as an estuary of national significance and was accepted into the National Estuary Program – one of only 28 nationwide. Since then, the Estuary Program has brought together citizens, scientists, elected officials, business owners, government representatives, landowners and other non-profit organizations to create a vision for the future of the estuary and a plan to achieve it. Our vision for a healthy estuary is a clean water body that supports both wildlife and human uses for current and future generations.

