



MEDIA RELEASE

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Morro Bay National Estuary Program Announces New Director

Assistant Director Lexie Bell will succeed Adrienne Harris as Executive Director of the Morro Bay National Estuary Program in 2016. Today the Board of Directors announced Bell will take on the leadership role for the organization starting in January, after six years as the second-in-command.

Bell first began working in Morro Bay as a graduate student at the UC Santa Barbara Bren School of Environmental Science and Management. In addition to her Master's degree, Lexie graduated from the University of Miami with a Bachelor of Science in Marine Science and Biology. Previously, Lexie worked for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Office of Education, the Nature Conservancy, and the Central Caribbean Marine Institute. A native of Florida, Lexie now lives with her family in Los Osos and enjoys our beautiful Central Coast beaches.

"I'm excited the Board of Directors has chosen Lexie Bell to succeed me as Director of the Estuary Program. Lexie has been a valuable member of our leadership team. During my time with the program, I've witnessed Lexie's passion for our mission and dedication to protecting Morro Bay," said Adrienne Harris, current Executive Director. Harris, who has led the program for the last five years, is resigning in 2016 to spend more focused time with her new baby.

"During the last year, the Board has been incredibly supportive of my desire to balance my new role as mother with my role as leader of the Estuary Program, and yet it's time for a new captain to take the helm," said Harris. Harris has worked to increase the Estuary Program's engagement with the community both locally and regionally. During a time when the program's federal funding decreased by 44%, Harris was able to maintain vital programs and even grow new ones. She worked with the staff and board to increase private funding support for the program by more than 300% during her tenure and designed a new Clean Water Pledge campaign to encourage residents to do their part for clean water. The campaign has now become a cornerstone of the Estuary Program's outreach efforts.

"It is our [the Board's] belief that the Morro Bay National Estuary Program has benefited greatly from Adrienne's tenure as Executive Director and feel she has set the stage for the Morro Bay National Estuary Program to continue its mission for years to come. We will miss working with Adrienne," said Joel Neel, President of the Board.

"I am thrilled to lead the next phase of the Estuary Program's work and continue the legacy of science-based, stakeholder-driven conservation. I look forward to working with our partners to tackle new challenges facing the bay. Our efforts will increasingly address adaptation to climate change, the diversity of uses on the bay, and preserving biodiversity," said Bell.

"It has been my immense pleasure to work with a dedicated staff and Board of Directors, as well as an active community of supporters to protect and restore this special place – Morro Bay," Harris said. Harris, who is a Leadership SLO Class 23 graduate, worked in Washington, D.C. for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration before moving to the Central Coast to work with the Estuary Program in 2010. She will continue to remain active in the nonprofit community in SLO County.

Morro Bay National Estuary Program is a non-regulatory, non-profit organization that brings together citizens, local government, non-profits, agencies, and landowners to protect and restore the Morro Bay Estuary for people and wildlife. The Estuary Program has been conducting monitoring and research, restoring natural habitats, and educating residents and visitors on how to keep Morro Bay clean and healthy since 1995. You can find out more about the Morro Bay National Estuary Program at www.mbnep.org. If you have questions, please contact Rachel Pass, Communications & Outreach Coordinator, at rpass@mbnep.org or 805-772-3834.