



Executive Committee Quarterly Meeting
MBNEP Offices, Morro Bay

May 10, 2017
4:00 pm

Staff Report

1. Introductions and Updates
2. Public Comment
3. Agenda Revisions
4. **ACTION:** Consider Approval of February 15, 2017 Executive Committee minutes
5. **ACTION:** Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Workplan Approval

The principal funding source for Estuary Program operations is the annual EPA grant. For FY 18, current budget projections indicate level funding at \$600,000, although staff developed alternate budgets for other potential scenarios. We apply annually in the spring for the next fiscal year's funding. As part of the application, we are required to prepare a proposed workplan that addresses the programmatic needs of the Estuary Program while also complying with EPA guidelines for such funding. Staff has developed a workplan that largely continues our major ongoing tasks through the next fiscal year. One new task has been added to begin the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) update process.

Staff recommends that the EC approve the proposed Workplan.

6. **ACTION:** Recommendations on Community Grant Applications (see attached)

There are four Community Grant applications this round for our consideration: snowy plover nesting area signs for State Parks; signage to promote sea otter stewardship by scuba divers in Morro Bay by Sea Otter Savvy; collaring and fieldwork to track mountain lion activity in the area by student Jordan Heiman; and update of their website by the Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District (CSLRCD). The mountain lion research proposal was reviewed by members of the Technical Working Group as well as individuals with experience in wildlife biology. The remaining three applications were reviewed by the Education & Outreach (E&O) Working Group.

In FY16, the \$5,000 request from the city of Morro Bay for the Boat Haulout Facility feasibility study was not needed and was never awarded. To date in FY17, one \$5,000 grant has been awarded. Thus, the Estuary Program has up to \$10,000 to award in this round of Community Grants. We may opt to hold back some of the funding for award in the future.

Project: Western Snowy Plover Nesting Area Signs
Applicant: State Parks

Request: \$2,784.18
Matching Funds: \$238.24
Total Budget: \$3,022.42

Summary: This request would purchase and install 450 Western Snowy Plover nesting area signs for use on the Montana de Oro State Park Sandspit. The effort would protect sensitive nesting habitat of the federally threatened Western Snow Plover. One-third of the signs would be in a highly-visible yellow color, to be placed along the access corridors. The other signs would be done in beige so they would have less of an impact on the view shed. The signs would be installed by State Parks staff and volunteers. This number of signs would last approximately ten years. State Parks thought an individual sign lasted for about five years or more. A reduced award would still be helpful, although if they drop below 300 signs, the price per sign would increase.

Recommendation: This application was reviewed by the E&O Working Group. They recommend funding the grant but are interested in printing the signs on a stronger material so that they last longer. State Parks proposed printing the signs on plastic, at a cost of \$2,784 (approximately \$6/sign). A high-pressure laminate (HPL) sign material costs \$19/sign but has a 10-year warranty and would be more sturdy. So for the same amount of money, 150 HPL signs could be printed. We did find a lot of plastic shards from snowy plover signs during Coastal Cleanup Day this year. State Parks said they have approximately 200 signs out on the Sandspit right now. Staff recommends funding up to 200 signs, not to exceed \$5,000, using a high quality material (e.g., HPL). As these details can be easily worked out with the awardee, staff recommends funding this grant.

Project: Promoting Sea Otter Stewardship in Scuba Divers in Morro Harbor

Applicant: Sea Otter Savvy, California State Parks, and California Department of Fish & Wildlife

Request: \$5,000

Matching Funds: \$1,086

Total Budget: \$6,086

Summary: Sea Otter Savvy uses a science-based approach to develop an outreach and education program to reduce human-caused disturbance to sea otters in California. The program's monitoring has indicated that disturbances to resting sea otters by scuba divers at Target Rock are all too frequent. According to Sea Otter Savvy, while similar disturbances have not been observed at Coleman Beach, the proximity of popular diving sites to sea otter resting locations make disturbance likely. The project proposes to design, fabricate, and install signs at these two locations which would address sensitive sea otter areas, tips for diving safely and responsibly in sea otter habitat, and additional text and graphics to describe otter needs. The city of Morro Bay and Harbor Department are supportive of the effort and would waive the sign permitting process. The applicant is confident that she can obtain the missing funding to complete two signs. Alternatively, they could produce one of the signs and put the remaining funding toward another aspect of their effort, which is to create education brochures and dive maps to be distributed through dive shops.

Recommendation: This application was reviewed by the E&O Working Group, who felt that due to the large number of signs along the estuary's edge, the proposed approach of creating and installing additional signage would not be effective. They recommended not funding the grant as is. However, the Working Group felt that the idea behind the project was worthy. They were interested in an outreach approach that included education for local dive shops as well as kayak, paddleboard, and other boat rental locations. They would like to see Sea Otter Savvy partner on this project with the Central Coast State Parks Association's SeaLife Stewards program, as the groups have similar goals. A waterproof handout or another small publication seems like it would be most useful for divers, kayakers, and other boaters, rather than large-scale signs. The Working Group would like to see the grant application come back with a project using this shifted approach. Staff agrees with this recommendation and would be happy to work with the applicant to revise the proposal and submit it during the next round of grants in the fall.

Project: San Luis Obispo Mountain Lion Research Project
Applicant: Jordan Heiman

Request: \$5,000
Matching Funds: \$95,000
Total Budget: \$100,000

Summary: Jordan Heiman, a master's student at UC Davis, will lead the local project in San Luis Obispo County. This is a broader state-wide effort by the California Department of Fish & Wildlife (CDFW) to capture and collar mountain lions throughout the state. A \$5,000 grant would fund the capture and collaring of three mountain lions, as well as visits to kill sites and the collection of ancillary data. The applicant states that feral pigs may make up a significant portion of a mountain lion's diet and that pigs can be destructive to native species as well as crops. The study would assess individual variation in prey selection and the ways in which prey preference alters the movement patterns and home range characteristics of each individual lion.

Recommendation: This application was sent to members of our Technical Working Group, who are familiar with the Estuary Program but not necessarily with mountain lion research. We also sent the application to reviewers at Cal Poly, Caltrans, etc. for comments. We were seeking both an opinion on whether this is a technically feasible approach, as well as whether it is a good fit for our Community Grant program. Of the four reviewers knowledgeable about wildlife biology, all said that the approach was technically sound and recommended funding it. Of the feedback we received from those more familiar with the Estuary Program, the concern was that this study would not provide much information that would be useful to us for meeting our CCMP goals. The recommendation from these reviewers was either to fund at a lesser level than \$5,000 or to deny funding altogether. The E&O Working Group looked at the application. While they are not making a formal recommendation, they felt that the project may be of high value but it not likely to directly affect our watershed and, thus, did not recommend funding. Staff queried the applicant to get more information about the impact of the work on the watershed. The applicant's answers did not make a strong connection between the proposed work and the watershed. Staff concurs with the reviewers who were more familiar with the Estuary Program goals and data needs. While the project is fascinating, the likelihood is low that the project would yield watershed-specific data that would be beneficial for management.

Project: Expanding Visibility for Coastal San Luis RCD
Applicant: Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District (CSLRCD)

Request: \$5,000
Matching Funds: \$1,500
Total Budget: \$6,500

Summary: The CSLRCD feels that although their work speaks for itself, they lack capacity in the areas of outreach and education. They are requesting funds to update their website. Their current site is difficult to maintain and manage. The revised website would showcase the organization's work, provide links to partner resources, and promote funding opportunities. The CSLRCD feels that this update would increase their ability to engage meaningfully with the community and would promote their partnership with the Estuary Program.

Recommendation: This application was reviewed by the E&O Working Group. While they stated their support for the valuable work of the CSLRCD, they had concerns about the application. The requested amount of \$5,000 seemed too low to complete a website redesign. The proposed project felt more like a capacity building project, rather than a true education and outreach project. For these reasons, the E&O Working Group does not recommend funding this grant. Staff concurs with this recommendation.

There will be some minor changes coming to improve communication and efficiency in the Community Grant application process. The likely changes to the process are as follows:

- Potential applications must be discussed with program staff prior to submittal.
- Projects will be reviewed for meeting the basic eligibility requirements of the Community Grants program by Estuary Program staff prior to being presented to the Implementation and Executive Committees. If an application does not meet the requirements, then staff can remove an application from further consideration.

7. ACTION: Executive Committee Bylaw Approval

Following the discussion at the November EC meeting, Marshall and Jennifer updated the bylaws, which were discussed in the February meeting. Clarification on e-voting procedures, term limits, and officer elections were discussed, and Marshall and Jennifer planned to add them to the bylaws.

The updated bylaws are presented to the EC for approval.

8. DISCUSSION: Presentation of EPA Semi-Annual Reports

Twice a year, the Estuary Program submits a semi-annual report to EPA to provide the program status on the budget and tasks laid out in our Workplan. Because we had an extension for the FY16 grant (through April 2017) and are also conducting work on the FY17 Workplan, we are required to submit two semi-annual reports. One semi-annual report covers the FY16 rollover funding and the other covers the FY17 funds. The time period for both reports is the same: the second half of FY16 (April 1, 2016 through September 30, 2016) and the first half of FY17 (October 1, 2016 through March 31, 2017). The reports summarize the budget status and Workplan task progress.

9. DISCUSSION: Performance Evaluation Letter Update

The EC requested periodic updates on the status of the corrective actions listed in the Performance Evaluation letter completed in early 2016. Estuary Program staff have made progress in the following areas:

Task Identified in Performance Evaluation	Estuary Program Activities to Complete Task
Refer to EPA 2015 CCMP guidance document when revising/updating CCMP, and develop an update consistent with new requirements.	Planning for CCMP update has been written into the FY18 Workplan.
Recommendations on updates to Communications Plan.	These items have already been included in the Communications Plan, which will be reviewed and updated during 2017.
Make information about accomplishments easier to find on the website.	Plans are underway to make these additions to the website this summer.
Conservation Planning Initiative document should establish restoration and protection numeric targets and identify and/or propose habitat protection and restoration activities that are tied to the CCMP action plans.	Partner discussions have been initiated, with work planned throughout 2017.
Continue ongoing evaluation of its monitoring program for both ambient conditions and project results.	Monitoring program review is constant and ongoing to ensure that relevant data are being collected in an accurate matter.
Continue to capture and publically display environmental results for stakeholders and supporters to view.	Through our blog, social media, and other outlets, the Estuary Program shares results of monitoring and restoration efforts.

Task Identified in Performance Evaluation	Estuary Program Activities to Complete Task
Expand the Workplan to contain more details on activities.	The Workplan format was reviewed and revised for the FY17 Workplan to ensure that it followed EPA's recommended format.
Complete a Climate Vulnerability Assessment Report.	The report was completed at the end of 2016.
Incorporate findings of the Climate Vulnerability Assessment Report into their work and describe in workplans.	The Estuary Program has incorporated the results of the report into monitoring, restoration, and education & outreach efforts. Specific examples include: 1) progress on the Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve Restoration Project, which addresses floodplain restoration. This is an identified action in the plan to address climate vulnerability. 2) USGS is conducting a tidal marsh study to look at impacts on the salt marsh due to climate change. The Estuary Program shared these results in our State of the Bay Report Card, as well as through our blog, social media, etc. 3) The Estuary Program supported modeling and assessment to look at projected changes to the groundwater basin yield in Los Osos with future climate change.
Provide a monitoring plan that is in line with the most up-to-date CCMP Guidance.	A draft Monitoring Plan has been written and will be completed by summer.
Identify a long-term numeric eelgrass acreage goal to provide a roadmap for restoration efforts.	The Estuary Program won grants from NOAA and CDFW to monitor and restore eelgrass. These efforts support the development of numeric eelgrass acreage goal, which we hope to develop over the next few years.
Continue working with the Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District and local NRCS staff to continue to work for reductions in nutrients and sediment in the watershed.	The Estuary Program partnered with the CSLRCD on two recent projects that addressed sediment reduction. We continue to work with these organizations on restoration, stormwater management, and other efforts to reduce nutrient and sediment in the watershed.

Staff plans to provide another update on PE task progress at the November 2017 EC meeting.

10. Adjourn to next meeting of August 23, 2017 at 4 p.m. at the Estuary Program offices.

Attachments:

1. February 2017 EC meeting minutes
2. Workplan FY2018 Draft
3. Community Grant applications (4)
4. Semi-annual reports (2)