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**Staff Report**

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1. Introductions and Updates
2. Public Comment
3. Agenda Revisions
4. **ACTION:** Consider Approval of November 2, 2017 IC minutes
5. **ACTION:** Monitoring and Research Project Funding Request for Pikeminnow eDNA work – See attachment

The Estuary Program and its partners work to understand current steelhead populations and to enhance habitat. These efforts have included pikeminnow management, which is work that we have found it difficult to fund despite being included as a high priority action in the 2013 Steelhead Recovery Plan (National Marine Fisheries Service). The proposed project involves conducting pikeminnow removal in the spring and collecting gut contents and creek water samples. These, along with gut samples collected last fall, would be submitted to University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) for environmental DNA (eDNA) analysis, which can detect the presence of steelhead and California red-legged frogs. A clearer picture of pikeminnow predation of steelhead will help us target our future project work and funding requests. The lack of clarity around pikeminnow-steelhead interactions and habitat use has stymied efforts to fund both pikeminnow removal and fish passage barrier removal projects in our watershed. Results of this project will provide much needed information to move steelhead protection forward in our watershed.

The work would be conducted under contract to Stillwater Sciences, at a cost of \$41,480. Staff is proposing the use of Restoration Funds. For the FY2018 to FY2022 Restoration Fund spending plan, \$111,500 is set aside for Monitoring and Research efforts. This proposal spends 37% of that budget.

6. **DISCUSSION:** FY2019 Workplan Input

As staff begins to create the FY2019 Workplan, we are interested in input from our committees to help prioritize our work. To that end, we asked committee members to complete a brief survey prior to this meeting. The results are currently being compiled and will be presented at the meeting.

7. **DISCUSSION:** FY2012 to 2017 Restoration Fund Spending Summary – See attachment

In May 2012, the Bay Foundation and Executive Committee approved a five-year spending plan for the Restoration Fund for \$600,000. The attached report summarizes Restoration Fund spending. During that time period, \$445,258 was allocated to projects. The total amounts and percent of overall allocation was as follows:

- Community Projects (formerly Community Mini-grants): \$40,649 (12%)
- Studies and Monitoring: \$25,531 (8%)
- Implementation: \$131,870 (39%), and

- Land Conservation: \$140,000 (41%).

The spending in Land Conservation was approved in November 2017 to support a Los Osos Valley conservation easement. The closing was delayed due to the timing of a state grant funding source. The Land Conservancy anticipates closing the easement in early 2018.

#### **8. DISCUSSION: Stormwater Management Projects**

The Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District and the Upper Salinas-Las Tablas Resource Conservation District are partnering with SLO County on the development of a SLO County Stormwater Resource Plan. The Estuary Program has been asked to be a stakeholder for the planning in our region, which encompasses Cayucos, Morro Bay, and Los Osos. As part of this process, we are being asked for ideas on any potential projects addressing stormwater runoff. These will be added to a list, and then projects will be scored according to a matrix to be determined by the county. The plan is expected to be completed by the fall, and an area is required to have this plan before their projects are eligible for Proposition 1 funding.

Staff is soliciting any project ideas related to reducing stormwater runoff to the estuary. Potential ideas include improvements to the parking lot at State Park Marina and stormwater treatment at Baywood Pier on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street in Los Osos.

#### **9. DISCUSSION: Implementation Committee Restructuring Ideas**

The Implementation Committee is one element of the Estuary Program's Management Conference. The Management Conference is a required component of being a National Estuary Program. As defined by the Clean Water Act, the primary purpose of the Management Conference is to develop and implement the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan, as well as monitor the effectiveness of actions taken under the Management Plan. Each Estuary Program designs their Management Conference to best suit their local community and priority issues. The Morro Bay National Estuary Program's Management Conference had a different initial structure that was modified after the Management Plan was approved and the program entered the implementation phase. Since 2000, the Management Conference has consisted of the Executive Committee, Implementation Committee, and Working Groups.

This current structure served the program well for many years, but is now experiencing decreased participation and engagement from stakeholders, particularly with regard to the Implementation Committee. In the past five years, the Estuary Program has twice surveyed Implementation Committee participants to gather feedback on meeting structure, content, location, timing, and more. Multiple changes over this time period have included: meeting location, adding a call-in feature, adding guest speaker agenda items, and providing meeting materials online. Despite these changes and concerted efforts to introduce new members to the Committee, participation has continued to decline. Feedback indicates that participation has declined likely due to the transition away from the Estuary Program providing significant funding to partners, as well as changing priorities of partner organizations and limited resources.

Based on feedback from individual committee members, experienced former members, and other National Estuary Programs, staff is working on a proposal to restructure the Implementation Committee. The goal is to best utilize the expertise and extensive knowledge of our partners and current members while creating a structure that supports the Estuary Program's mission and EPA requirements. Any initial feedback from Implementation Committee members is welcome. Staff will provide multiple opportunities for additional feedback between now and the May Implementation Committee meeting.

## 10. DISCUSSION: Program Updates

**Eelgrass Update:** Staff has been busy with eelgrass efforts in the bay. We conducted monitoring late last year to track eelgrass bed conditions. A multi-spectral flight was flown on a low tide in early December, and staff are eagerly awaiting the creation of a bay-wide eelgrass map. We continue to partner with Cal Poly on research and monitoring efforts. Cal Poly flew their drone around the time of our multi-spectral flight, and we are planning on comparing imagery and eelgrass acreage values from the two methods. We collected eelgrass seeds last fall and planted them in areas throughout the bay. We are monitoring the seeds and saw some sprouting in the back bay. We are also gearing up for eelgrass transplanting this winter and spring, with work planned for the end of February and the end of March.

**Morro Bay Science Explorations Series:** The second in a series of three scientific talk events will be held on Thursday, February 8 at the SLO Botanical Gardens from 6 to 8 p.m. Speakers include:

- Dr. Karen Thorne of the USGS will talk about her work studying sea level rise impacts on tidal marshes,
- Dr. Michael Boswell of Cal Poly will talk about climate adaptation management, and
- Joanna Wu of Audubon California will talk about how bird habitat will be affected by climate shifts.

11. Adjourn to next meeting of May 3, 2018 at 12:00 pm at the Estuary Program offices.

### **Attachments:**

- Minutes from November 2, 2017 meeting
- Summary of Restoration Fund Spending: FY2013 to FY2017
- Funding Request for Pikeminnow eDNA Analysis