



Executive Committee Quarterly Meeting  
Estuary Program offices, Morro Bay, CA

February 14, 2018  
4:00 pm

### Minutes

**Attendees:** Marshall Ochylski, *Los Osos CSD*; Jennifer Epp, *Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board*; Tim Duff (on the phone), *CA Coastal Conservancy*; Jeremiah O'Brien, *Morro Bay Commercial Fisherman's Organization*; Joel Neel, *Bay Foundation*; Ethan Bell, *Stillwater Sciences*; Kristin Hardy, *Cal Poly*; John Flaherty, *Central Coast Outdoors*; Matt Makowetski, *city of Morro Bay*; Suzanne Marr (on the phone), *USEPA*; Lexie Bell, *MBNEP Staff*; Ann Kitajima, *MBNEP Staff*.

#### 1. Introductions and Updates

- Marshall Ochylski: Sign unveiling at Pasadena Pt access point on Saturday. Sign is very nice. The Estuary Program contributed to content of sign.
- Lexie: Received notice that we were awarded a California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) grant for Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve (CCER) implementation. We will be working with the Coastal Conservancy for match funding. The federal budget is a year ahead of our funding. The president released a new budget and zeroed us out. We are in the draft budget bill on both the Senate and House side and have strong Congressional support. We anticipate receiving level funding in this budget. So we are cautiously optimistic about the budget. Lexie and Ann will be attending the EPA-NEP conference in Washington, D.C. in the second week of March. A portion of the meeting will be with EPA, and we will visit our representatives and senators with other California NEPs.
- Ann: The Community Project with Celebrate Los Osos (CLO) is nearly complete. CLO created, printed, and distributed information on invasive weeds. The group has a weed pull event scheduled for this weekend. We are currently soliciting applications for the next round of Community Projects, with a March 2 due date.
- Ethan: Working on removing aquatic invasives from Chorro.
- Jeremiah: Filling in for Trudy. The Morro Bay Commercial Fisherman's Organization issued their annual Economic Report containing data from 2016. This includes economic data for various fisheries including the value, poundage, and employment, and the data includes aquaculture. This is the sixth report of this kind. Request additional copies from Jeremiah if interested. Crab fishing going on west coast from Point San Luis and north. It's been a fairly slow year everywhere for crab.
- Joel: No updates from the Bay Foundation.
- Kristin: Cal Poly has selected Ben Ruttenberg to serve as the new director of their Center for Coastal Marine Sciences program. Ben's research focuses on fish and MPA conservation. Dean Wendt is now the Dean of the College of Science and Math. There are no new marine-focused faculty hired this year.
- John: It's been slow tourism-wise, other than Winter Bird festival, which was a success. Numbers were down just a little bit for the festival, mostly due to last minute cancellations resulting from the Highway 101 closure in Montecito.
- Jennifer: There were a few items of interest from the December 2017 and February 2018 Water Board meetings. There is a revised permit for the City of Morro Bay and Cayucos WWTP. There was a permit for the Morro Bay Power Plant pipeline removal project for Dynegy, where they are decommissioning the pipe to the ocean from the power plant. There were also activities related to ag order renewal; dealing with environmental justice and replacement water issues (drinking water due to well water contamination) throughout region; and fire response in south.
- Matt: The city is issuing a Request for Proposals for the new WWTP facility. They expect three groups to bid on plant construction by mid-April. The number one site is the South Bay site, and a memorandum of understanding has been completed with the landowner. The city is in the closing

stages of the Environmental Impact Report. Depending on bids, a 218 vote might be needed. The plan is to reintroduce treated water in the Leila Keiser and Highway 41 areas. The city applied for an EPA Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) loan and were one of a dozen invited to submit the full application by June. The city is applying for \$20 million to \$25 million to treat water and reinject it. The city's contract for State water will be up in 2025, and the city recognizes that it needs to diversify water sources. Unsure if water will be used for surface recharge since if you put water into stream, you have to supply enough to maintain surface flows. The city doesn't know if it can sustain this.

- Suzanne (on phone): EPA is still here.
- Tim (on phone): no updates

2. Public Comment – None presented.
3. Agenda Revisions – Lexie requested to add an item to approve a resolution for the Estuary Program to submit an application to the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation's Ocean Protection Council Prop 1 program to plan and implement green infrastructure at Morro Bay State Park's Baywood Parking Lot and Marina area.
4. **ACTION:** Consider Approval of November 8, 2017 Executive Committee meeting minutes

**Vote:** Joel Neel motioned to approve, Matt Makowetski seconded. Unanimous in favor.

5. **ACTION:** Monitoring and Research Project Funding Request for Pikeminnow eDNA Work (see attached)

Sacramento pikeminnow in Chorro Creek causes a number of problems, including predating on steelhead and competing for resources. We have been unable to conduct fish passage removal projects on tributaries since the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) doesn't want the pikeminnow to spread to the tributaries. Thus, steelhead-related work is at an impasse. The Estuary Program worked with partners to develop a pikeminnow management plan and conduct some removal efforts. We've received some feedback from CDFW where they seem to be questioning the value of pikeminnow removal efforts. We are unsure of the impacts if we don't conduct any further pikeminnow management. All available data is from limited sampling efforts, and some of the data is seven to eight years old.

Ethan Bell from Stillwater Sciences worked with the California Conservation Corps (CCC), city of San Luis Obispo, Trout Unlimited, and others and determined the best approach to move the work forward is to conduct environmental DNA (eDNA) analysis to determine if pikeminnow are using any of the tributaries and whether they are actually predating on steelhead. The Estuary Program compiled a staff funding request for Restoration Funds. The requested \$41,480 would spend 37% of the funding for Monitoring & Research reserved for the next five years. Staff feels this is a good use of Restoration Funds because we have been well underspent in this category in the past, this is important data that we need to inform future work, and we can't get this funded through other sources.

The proposed project looks at stomach samples of pikeminnow, some of which were collected this past fall and some to be collected this spring, to confirm if pikeminnow are predating on steelhead. This method is more accurate than gut content analysis and gives you information from a longer period of time. The effort also involves collecting and analyzing creek water to determine if pikeminnow were present our mainstem and tributary creeks.

The Bay Foundation reviewed the request and had a thorough discussion. The information from the additional length of time from eDNA analysis doesn't seem like very much time, but it is much more accurate than gut content analysis. Questions came up about the cost. The main cost with lab analysis is setting up the assays; thus, the number of samples doesn't make a big difference in cost. The Bay

Foundation felt that this data is crucial for any future steelhead projects in the watershed. They were concerned about the veracity of the report and wanted to ensure that it was more detailed than indicated in the presentation/scope. With the modification of a more detailed final report, the Bay Foundation voted to support funding.

During the discussion, the question came up of how effective removal efforts have been. Ethan commented that they have been effective, but maintaining the efforts are crucial. The project needs support from the state and other funders to keep implementing removal. Thus far the work focused only on Chorro Creek. Anecdotally, pikeminnow are also of concern in Los Osos Creek. The proposed work would collect water samples for eDNA analysis to determine if pikeminnow are present in Los Osos Creek.

The majority of the project cost is for UCSB to conduct the analysis. The value added from Stillwater's involvement includes: 1) Stillwater will handle contracting with UCSB, which can be complex and time consuming, 2) Stillwater provides expertise on whether work being done correctly, 3) Stillwater has an existing relationship with UCSB. As few labs are doing the work, UCSB was the natural choice.

The question came up of whether this information would be useful to CDFW, who have been a challenging partner to work with. This effort is proactively trying to answer the CDFW's questions. There is no guarantee that this information will secure us additional funding. The information gained will either document an existing predation issue (so we can then focus on removal) or that they aren't predating (so we can focus on fish passage). It is a robust scientifically-defensible study that will provide valuable information. The results of the study will be presented to our pikeminnow-focused technical advisory committee (TAC) to make decisions on how to proceed.

**Vote:** Joel Neel moved to approve with Bay Foundation recommendation of adding more rigor to the report. Matt Makowetski seconded. No more discussion. All in favor. Ethan recused himself from the vote.

#### **6. ACTION:** Election of EC Chair and Vice Chair

Jennifer Epp agreed to serve as Chair as nominated. The Water Board determined that it was not a conflict of interest for her to serve in this role for the two-year term. There were no other nominations for the Chair.

**Vote:** All voted in favor, with Jennifer abstaining from the vote. None opposed.

For the Vice Chair position, Marshall Ochylski nominated Kristin Hardy to serve a two-year term. Kristin stated that she was now tenured at Cal Poly, which gave her more time for additional service commitments and that she was seeking opportunities to work with the local fishing community.

**Vote:** All in favor. Kristin abstained from voting. None opposed.

#### **7. DISCUSSION:** FY 2019 Workplan Input

Staff presented the results to date from the survey completed by Implementation Committee and Executive Committee members to identify their top priorities for the Workplan for FY2019. It also gave respondents a chance to identify low priority projects, any efforts that appeared to be missing, and any upcoming efforts in their own organizations that would be of interest to the Estuary Program. Staff told committee members that if they had not yet had a chance to complete the survey, their input was still welcome.

8. **DISCUSSION:** FY 2012 to 2017 Restoration Funding Spending Summary – see attached

The spending report was updated with information through the end of FY 2017 and resubmitted to the EC. The totals presented include the \$140,000 for the Land Conservancy conservation easement in the Los Osos Valley. The project has been delayed due to timing of a state grant but is expected to be completed in early 2018.

9. **DISCUSSION:** Stormwater Management Projects

Staff is soliciting stormwater management project ideas. Potential ideas thus far include improvements to the parking lot at State Park Marina and stormwater treatment at Baywood Pier in Los Osos. Please submit ideas to the Estuary Program as soon as possible, as the plan is moving ahead on an accelerated schedule.

10. **ACTION:** Stormwater Grant Resolution

Lexie presented a resolution for EC approval for an application to the California Marine Sanctuary Foundation's Ocean Protection Council Prop 1 program to plan and implement green infrastructure at Morro Bay State Park's Baywood Parking Lot and Marina area.

**Vote:** Kristin made a motion to approve. Seconded by Matt. All in favor. None opposed.

11. **DISCUSSION:** Implementation Committee Restructuring Ideas

The Estuary Program has an Implementation Committee and Executive Committee who, along with the Bay Foundation, helps us make decisions. We also have Technical Advisory Committees (TACs) to convene as needed for technical advice. When the program was founded, we had a large amount of Restoration Funds to give out as grants to partner organizations, which increased engagement on the IC. As we no longer give out large grants, IC participation has dwindled. We have tried different meeting locations, added guest speakers, etc. Despite these efforts, we've seen no real change in participation levels, with meeting attendance by a small but dedicated group. When considering this restructuring, we gathered data from former staff members, board members, etc. Staff would like to make some changes to the IC so that we get valuable stakeholder input while keeping stakeholders feeling engaged.

We are considering moving away from a general committee to a number of topic-specific TACs. Anyone with technical expertise or interest can participate by indicating their sub-area of interest. We would convene the TAC groups less frequently than quarterly. We discussed this approach with the Bay Foundation and the IC, and both groups were open to exploring other options to keep the committees engaging and useful.

There was some concern that this approach would require more staff time. While this is true, staff believes that this approach would enhance engagement and increase input for the EC to make decisions.

A more concrete proposal will be presented at the May meeting.

12. Adjourn to next meeting of May 9, 2018 at 4:00 pm at the Estuary Program offices.

**Attachments to staff report:**

- Minutes from November 8, 2017 meeting
- Summary of Restoration Fund Spending: FY 2012 to FY 2017
- Funding Request for Pikeminnow eDNA analysis