

Morro Bay National Estuary Program  
EPA Program Evaluation Status  
for 2020

Prepared for the Executive Committee Meeting in May 2018

This memo provides the status of the required actions outlined in the Program Evaluation (PE) letter from the 2015 review by EPA.

### **CCMP Update**

Status: Ongoing

Planning for the update has been written into the Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Workplan. The tasks planned for this year include:

- Hired an intern to assist with the update process. He analyzed the 2012 version of the CCMP, reviewed the latest EPA guidance on Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) updates, and began compiling a database to assess Estuary Program progress toward completing CCMP action plans. This position will continue through the spring of 2018.
- Continue with the conservation planning work, which will inform the CCMP update process. Held a TAC meeting to solicit expertise from local experts on monitoring, restoration, and measurable targets. The next TAC meeting is scheduled for May, and participants will help identify potential projects for habitat conservation.
- CCMP update will be completed in 2020. An involved public process is not likely required since we are updating the plan rather than doing a complete revision as we did in 2012.

### **Communication Plan Updates**

Status: Ongoing

The Executive Director and Communications and Outreach Coordinator will create an FY19 to FY22 Communication Plan. Staff plans to begin work under this plan in early FY19.

### **Accomplishments on Website**

Status: Nearly completed

EPA wanted to see more readily accessible information on the website about the program's accomplishments. The updated website content has been developed, and the content has been developed for the webpage. We are currently working with a graphic designer on the page, and the task is expected to be completed by the end of Summer 2018.

### **Conservation Planning**

Status: Ongoing

EPA wanted to see completion of a conservation plan that establishes restoration and protection numeric targets and identifies and/or proposes habitat protection and restoration activities that are tied to the CCMP Action Plans. We convened a Technical Advisory Committee that met earlier this year to discuss priority issues for the watershed and estuary. A second meeting is planned for May to identify future on the ground projects and assessments needed in the Morro Bay watershed and discuss further partnerships, feasibility, and funding for projects already on our current project 'wish' list. The draft

Conservation Planning Initiative is expected to be completed in the Fall of 2018, with draft review ongoing through the winter, and plan completion in Spring 2019.

### **Evaluation of Monitoring Program**

Status: Completed, with annual updates

As previously reported, EPA encouraged the program to continue its ongoing evaluation of the Monitoring Program for both ambient conditions and project results. The Monitoring Program conducted a review of the monitoring sites and protocols to create an annual monitoring workplan. This internal document lays out the types of monitoring and sites for the upcoming year. This gives staff an overview of both their workload as well as a good birds' eye view of what we have planned for the year. The data is collected to assess programmatic and environmental results in the long-term. We feel that recent changes to our program allow us to do this. We plan to update the monitoring workplan for 2019.

### **Sharing Environmental Results**

Status: Ongoing

EPA encouraged the Estuary Program to continue to capture and publicly-display these tangible results for stakeholders and supporters to view. The program is currently achieving this through many avenues, including the newsletter, the weekly blog, and scientific presentations.

Recent activities focused on sharing environmental results include:

- The Estuary Program developed a Science Explorations talk series for this year. Our first event in October focused on eelgrass. The second event in February and focused on climate change and included speakers addressing sea level rises on Morro Bay's tidal marsh, impacts to birds as habitats shift, and management related to climate change impacts. The final event will be in June and will focus on local fisheries. We are planning a speaker series for FY19.
- The program hosted a screening of the documentary by local filmmaker Simo Nylander called *Of Marshes and Morros*. It was a free event open to program partners, volunteers, and supporters. The film is currently available via the Estuary Program website.
- We updated the content on the kiosk in the Nature Center and made it available online, adding segments on monitoring, climate change, steelhead, a bay cam, and other content.
- We continue to compile data for reports and memos to share them with partners and the public.
- We continue to publish our weekly blog, with updates on monitoring, fieldwork, projects, and events.

### **Expand the Workplan**

Status: Completed

As previously reported, EPA asked that we expand the format of the Workplan to include more details on our activities. We did this for the 2018 Workplan and the 2019 Workplan.

### **Climate Vulnerability Assessment**

Status: Completed

As previously reported, the Estuary Program completed a Climate Vulnerability Assessment, per EPA's guidance. The completed document is available on our program website, and we have shared the results via blog posts, presentations, posters, social media, and our website. Part of the CCMP update process includes assessing each action plan with the climate vulnerability assessment.

### **Develop a Monitoring Plan**

Status: Completed, with annual updates

As previously reported, EPA wanted to see a Monitoring Plan, separate from the program Quality Assurance Project Plan, that met the latest CCMP guidance. The Estuary Program created such a document and submitted it to our Regional Project Manager in September 2017 for her review. She approved the draft and forwarded it to EPA Headquarters for their review. We are awaiting their comments and plan to update the document on an annual basis.

### **Eelgrass Acreage Goal**

Status: Ongoing

EPA wants to see long-term numeric eelgrass goals to provide a roadmap for restoration efforts. The Estuary Program has been working towards this. We partnered with Cal Poly, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the California Department of Fish & Wildlife (CDFW), the city of Morro Bay, and others to research the causes and study the impacts of the decline of this seagrass in the last decade. With grants from CDFW and NOAA, the Estuary Program furthered these research, monitoring, and restoration efforts. We conducted two rounds of experimental eelgrass planting in February and March of 2018. We are monitoring these transplant areas as well as locations where eelgrass seeds were planted. This iterative adaptive management effort allows us to work toward long-term eelgrass restoration goals. We are currently operating with a NOAA grant for eelgrass monitoring and restoration for 2017 through 2018. We completed work under a CDFW Duck Stamp grant and applied to CDFW for additional funding.

### **Partnering with the CSLRCD**

Status: Ongoing

EPA wants to see us continue to work with the Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District (CSLRCD) on projects to reduce sediment and nutrients in the watershed. We partnered with the CSLRCD on a few recent projects.

- For the Los Osos Wetland Project, the Estuary Program reviewed the restoration plans and distributed them to our Technical Advisory Committee for feedback. We anticipated continuing to partner on this restoration effort.
- The Stormwater Resource Plan for the County is being coordinated by the CSLRCD. The Estuary Program serves as a stakeholder for the Morro Bay and Los Osos subregion and provides input on the effort.
- Estuary Program staff have regular meetings with CSLRCD staff to establish collaborations and projects.