

**Morro Bay National Estuary Program
EPA Program Evaluation Status
for 2020**

Prepared for the Executive Committee Meeting in November 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 was written into the Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Workplan and is also included in the FY2019 Workplan.

- Hired two interns to assist with the update process. They analyzed the 2012 version of the CCMP, reviewed the latest EPA guidance on Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) updates, and compiled a database to assess Estuary Program progress toward completing CCMP action plans. This internship position ended in June. We began the process to hire a planning intern to start in early 2019.
- Continued with the conservation planning work, which will inform the CCMP update process. Held a second Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meeting to solicit project ideas from local partners and technical experts. Conservation Plan document development is underway, with a draft expected in early FY19.
- 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 web developer on the page, and the task is expected to be completed by the end of Spring 2019.

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 second TAC meeting to discuss potential projects to address the Conservation Planning targets and goals, as well as assessments needed in the Morro Bay watershed. Also discussed further partnerships, feasibility, and funding for projects already on our

current project 'wish' list. Conducted follow-up meetings and calls with participants and with those who could not attend to further develop potential ideas. 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 update the annual monitoring workplan for 2019. This updated version was reviewed with Suzanne Marr and submitted to EPA Headquarters. 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 2020.

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 FY18. Our first event in October focused on eelgrass. The second event in February and focused on climate change. The third event was held in June and focused on local fisheries. We are planning a speaker series for FY19 that will include three events.
- We won a grant from the SLO County Community Foundation to fund an updated exhibit in the Nature Center focused on climate, tides, and sea level rise.
- We designed an updated wildlife viewing exhibit for the Nature Center, which will be installed in Fall 2018.
- We completed a science-based interactive kiosk in the Nature Center that presents data and information on water quality, climate change, and other topics. The kiosk content is also available online at learn.mbnep.org.
- We continue to compile data for reports and memos to share them with partners and the public. Recent products include the 2017 Bioassessment Memo, the 2017 Eelgrass Report, and the 2018 Seeps Memo.
- 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. This work was initiated by the interns who supported the CCMP update process.

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 (May 3, 2016 version). The Estuary Program created the document and submitted it to our Regional Project Manager in September 2018 for her review. She approved the document and forwarded it to EPA Headquarters. We 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 completed a NOAA grant that included eelgrass transplanting and monitoring. 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 completed a bay-wide eelgrass map using multi-spectral data collected in December 2017. We were recently awarded a CDFW Duck Stamp grant that will fund restoration and restoration monitoring over the next two years. We continue to work with Cal Poly on their Sea Grant project focused on the circulation and hydrodynamics of Morro Bay and how these track with the eelgrass decline. The project began in the summer of 2018, with the Estuary Program providing field support for eelgrass monitoring and data to populate the hydrodynamic modeling. The Estuary Program was awarded funding from EPA and US Fish and Wildlife Service to conduct a baywide bathymetry survey. An updated bay elevation data set will inform eelgrass restoration efforts as well as populate the Sea Grant hydrodynamic model.

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.

- 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.
- The Estuary Program contributed funding to a CSLRCD Climate Ready Rangeland grant project to conduct restoration work on a private ranch in the watershed.
- Estuary Program staff have regular meetings with CSLRCD staff to establish collaborations and projects. Priorities for potential projects to develop in FY19 include bioreactors, expansion of Climate Ready Rangeland practices to other landowners, floodplain/wetland restoration, and water conservation.