



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

February 13, 2019
4:00 pm

Minutes

Attendees: Jennifer Epp, *Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board*; Sam Schuchat, (on the phone), *CA Coastal Conservancy*; Ethan Bell, *Stillwater Sciences*; Crow White, *Cal Poly*; Becka Kelly, *City of Morro Bay*; Jeremiah O'Brien, *Morro Bay Commercial Fishermen's Organization*; Bruce Gibson (on the phone), *SLO County*; Suzanne Marr (on the phone), *EPA*; Ann Kitajima, *MBNEP Staff*; Lexie Bell, *MBNEP Staff*.

1. Introductions and Updates

- Sam Schuchat: Since the last meeting, the Coastal Conservancy board did a site visit to Morro Bay. They appreciated the Estuary Program's participation in the tour. The board really enjoyed being in the area.
- Suzanne Marr: Don't know if working on Tuesday or not. Thanks for carrying on during furlough. No other updates. Will be at the national meeting in Washington, D.C. in March.
- Becka Kelly: Watching with rain and king tides, concerned about water quality. Seeing a lot of debris coming in from back bay. Trying to pick up everything they can. With all of the stormwater runoff happening, they are placing absorbent pads in certain areas to catch oil before it reaches the stormwater drains. No update yet on dredging, it will probably be in May.
- Jeremiah O'Brien: No updates for group. Working with Castle Winds on their energy development plans. Let Jeremiah know if we have any questions.
- Ethan Bell: In fall, completed eDNA work on Chorro Creek to confirm the presence of steelhead and pikeminnow. Stillwater Sciences wrote a blog post for the Estuary Program blog, which is now up on our website. They are writing a manuscript for publication for peer review, and the Estuary Program and UC Santa Barbara will be coauthors. He feels that the work puts us in a good position to move forward with additional Chorro Creek pikeminnow work.
- Jennifer Epp: On upcoming Water Board agenda, there was an updated aquaculture general permit, but unsure if it affects any facilities in our watershed. It was a general order that has some standard conditions where various facilities are enrolled rather than individual permits. Another topic of interest to the Board is climate change. Staff spent a day at a recent meeting briefing the Board on the state of climate change and what staff are looking to do. The Board members are interested, and they now have many questions on this related to other issues that come before them. Suzanne is interested in any materials presented. Jennifer will share materials. Board instructed all staff to consider climate change in all permits. Jennifer will look at impacts related to fishing and where Water Board authority extends. Jeremiah was wondering if the Water Board is issuing permits related to fisheries. There was an issue in Puget Sound last year with farming of fish not native to area.
- Ann Kitajima: no updates.
- Lexie Bell: ANEP (Association of National Estuary Programs) is having its spring meeting in Washington, D.C. in March, assuming the federal government is open. She will be meeting with other NEPs and EPA partners as well as with congressional representatives.

- Bruce Gibson: There was a recent op ed piece in the New Times from landowners in the Los Osos Basin who are interested in capturing stormwater that would otherwise run into Los Osos and Warden Creeks. The piece had a number of serious misstatements about the plan to balance the Basin. The Basin Plan Committee doesn't see that the proposed solutions are a likely source of new water for Los Osos. The estuary needs the water flowing to it. There is a huge amount of environmental analysis needed before that could happen, and Basin Management Committee is not interested in pursuing the proposed ideas because they feel that there are less impactful ways to improve the water supply.
 - Crow White: Alternate for Kristin Hardy. His current grad student has decided to focus their research on lamprey and will be working with Freddy Otte of the City of San Luis Obispo. They will be testing the hypothesis that juvenile lamprey eel filter out fecal coliform and help creek health from both the steelhead and human health perspective. They will be conducting lab experiments and field experiments. Lamprey were native here but were absent for 10 years. In the last year or so, they've been spotted in creeks, and they could be more important than we realize.
2. Public Comment – None presented.
 3. Agenda Revisions – None.
 4. **ACTION:** Consider Approval of November 14, 2018 Executive Committee (EC) meeting minutes.

Vote: Crow motioned to approve, Ethan seconded. Unanimous in favor.

5. **ACTION:** Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve Implementation Funding Request

Staff presented a request of Restoration Funding to support the Ecological Reserve. This is the piece of property that we helped purchase but transferred ownership to CDFW (California Department of Fish and Wildlife). Sam and the Coastal Conservancy board came out to see the site and awarded \$400,000 of funding for implementation. We also received approximately \$1,000,000 in funding from CDFW for the restoration project to improve creek habitat, restore the natural floodplain, and address areas of erosion along the creek. We also received EPA funding from the FY2018 grant for the permitting and surveys needed to start construction. The project is now wrapping up the permitting phase and moving into implementation. This phase requires additional funding, including support for engineering oversight of implementation, contractor upgrades for well improvement (capped or moved), native plantings by the California Conservation Corps, and some budget contingency for permitting, engineering costs, etc. Funding from the Restoration Fund would give us some flexibility. The request for proposals is expected to go out in the next month or so, and the remaining permits should be obtained in that timeframe. Once the project gets going, we expect things to move pretty quickly, so our preference is to have Restoration Fund monies approved so that we have flexibility to get through project without having to come back and ask for additional funding.

Ethan had a question on the monitoring. He wanted to know if the groundwater recharge or groundwater levels will be monitored. This would be good value added to the project to demonstrate groundwater levels improving with floodplain restoration. It's possible that a Cal Poly professor might be interested.

Vote: Sam moved to approve. Ethan seconded. All in favor.

6. **DISCUSSION:** FY2020 Workplan Inputs (see attached)

Staff reviewed the results of the survey to solicit input for the FY2020 Workplan update. See the attached survey summary results.

A few items were discussed in additional detail, including the South Bay Boulevard bridge replacement project. The plan is to build a new bridge because that is less expensive than retrofitting the existing bridge. The bridge has pilings in the creek, and the hope is that the new bridge would have pilings outside of the creek. We are encouraging them to remove some of the fill on the north side to allow a tidal change into Los Osos Creek that is more natural. We are encouraging them to do this to minimize mitigation requirements. Jennifer said it's good that we're talking to them about this early on in the project when it's easier to influence the direction of the project. The project hasn't gone to the Coastal Commission yet. Since it's a seismic retrofit, they have federal funding through Caltrans but the project has a local match requirement. The county must fund 12% of project, according to Bruce. Construction is expected to begin within a couple of years. How much fill can be removed is not certain due to cost, but the county would like to remove pilings from the creek.

Questions came up on the Castle Winds energy project to see if staff is including it in the Workplan. The main issues we would be concerned with would be how related infrastructure might impact the estuary. The impacts are expected to be minimal but not much detail is known at this time. We are not getting involved in discussions of renewable energy countywide since this is outside of our jurisdiction, but we are paying attention to what project might look like and continuing to interact with our partners.

7. DISCUSSION: FY2018 to 2022 Restoration Fund Spending Summary (see attached)

The Restoration Fund is money we manage for restoration, monitoring, research, and Community Projects. The Bay Foundation and Water Board approve any spending from the fund. In February 2017, the EC approved a new five-year spending plan of \$600,000 for FY2018 to FY2022. The following is a status update on spending through the end of FY18. We spent 20% of Community Projects funding, 37% of Studies and Monitoring (on the pikeminnow eDNA project), 0% on implementation, and 0% on land conservation. As a reminder, we spent \$140k on the Kandarian farms easement in partnership with the Land Conservancy of SLO County using funding from our last five-year spend plan that ended in 2017. In the Workplan, we include \$10k each year for us to spend on smaller items so don't have to come to committees for things like extra supplies for eelgrass restoration.

8. DISCUSSION: Program Highlights

Staff provided some updates on various areas of the program. Staff are working with Technical Advisory Committee members to obtain feedback on Community Project applications and on the 2020 State of the Bay Report. Eelgrass restoration beds from 2017 and 2018 are continuing to thrive, and planting efforts are underway for February and March of this year. The Sea Grant project is benefitting from all of the rain, with Cal Poly sensors monitoring bay water quality while the Estuary Program monitors creek sediment levels during storms. The Nature Center has had an update with new viewing scopes and an updated wildlife exhibit. The program received a \$40,000 grant from the Harold J. Miozzi Charitable Trust over three years to support the Mutts for the Bay program. The Estuary Program will be hosting a Science Explorations event on February 21 from 6 to 8 p.m. at the SLO Botanical Gardens on the topic of steelhead.

9. Adjourn at 5:15 to next meeting of May 8, 2019 at 4:00 pm at the Estuary Program offices.

Attachments:

- Minutes from November 14, 2018 EC meeting
- Summary of FY20 Workplan survey input
- FY2018 to 2022 Restoration Fund Spending Plan (approved August 2017)