



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

May 8, 2019
4:00 pm

Minutes

Attendees: Jennifer Epp, *Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board*; Ethan Bell, *Stillwater Sciences*; Kristin Hardy, *Cal Poly*; Bruce Gibson, *SLO County*; Jeff Heller, *City of Morro Bay*; Marshall Ochylski, *LOCSD*; Bill Henry, *Bay Foundation*; Suzanne Marr, *EPA*; Ann Kitajima, *MBNEP Staff*; Lexie Bell, *MBNEP Staff*; Justin Klaparda; *MBNEP Staff*.

1. Introductions and Updates

- Suzanne Marr: Was at the national meeting in Washington, D.C. in March. No news yet on the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) loan for the city of Morro Bay treatment plan.
- Ethan Bell: Flows are still up and he's seen steelhead in various creeks.
- Jennifer Epp: On upcoming Water Board agenda, no items for this watershed. Mostly it is focused on the upcoming update to the ag order.
- Marshall Ochylski: No updates for the group.
- Jeff Heller: No updates for the group.
- Bruce Gibson: The Los Osos Basin Management Committee continues its work. The Los Osos Habitat Conservation Plan is expected to be published in the Federal Register in mid-July. The County consolidated the permit for the Morro Bay Water Reclamation Facility so that it will go directly to the Coastal Commission. The hearing is expected in July in San Luis Obispo.
- Bill Henry: No updates for the group.
- Justin Klaparda: Justin is serving as our Environmental Planning Intern, focusing on updating the Comprehensive Conservation & Management Plan (CCMP).
- Kristin Hardy: Kristin is on sabbatical for a year, and so is Crowe. She will assist in identifying someone in the department to attend in their place in the short term. Cal Poly just broke ground on a new science building that will eventually house the marine sciences folks. Construction should last about two years with the new building expected to be opened in fall 2021. Jean Davidson is a Biology Department faculty member at Cal Poly whose work focuses on genetics and genomics. Kristin thought she might be interested in collaborating with us. The spring Pier Open House was cancelled because construction was underway to build a docking landing area under the pier to support boating and diving activities. The construction was recently completed.
- Ann Kitajima: No updates.
- Lexie Bell: Conducting interviews with the support of the engineering firm to select a contractor for the Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve (CCER) restoration project.

2. Public Comment – None presented.

3. Agenda Revisions – None.

4. **ACTION:** Consider Approval of February 13, 2019 Executive Committee (EC) meeting minutes.

Vote: Kristin motioned to approve, Bruce seconded. Unanimous in favor.

5. **ACTION:** Recommend approval of Fiscal Year 2020 Workplan (see attached)

Staff described how workplan tasks are designed to be broad so that we can take advantage of project opportunities that arise during the year. There are two new tasks for Fiscal Year 2020 (FY20). The State Park Marina Parking lot project is slated for the summer of 2020 and will address stormwater runoff to the estuary. The Program Evaluation is a review process that takes place every five years. Representatives from the EPA Region and Headquarters along with the director of another NEP will come to Morro Bay to evaluate our program. Ours is expected to be in the summer of 2020.

Bruce wondered if we were investing enough effort in studying the causes of eelgrass decline rather than focusing on restoration. Staff explained the recent research efforts by Cal Poly and others, including a multi-year Sea Grant project that is studying water quality, sediment, circulation, and hydrodynamics. Suzanne explained that she describes our work as having three efforts: 1) Work to track the decline, 2) Restoration experiments, and 3) Monitoring and research to understand the impacts of water quality and other causes.

Ethan suggested having control plots next to eelgrass transplant plots where no eelgrass is planted. This will help determine whether eelgrass is present due to our transplant work or whether it is naturally coming back in the area. Ethan pointed out that Humboldt Bay has quite a bit of sedimentation and also has healthy thriving eelgrass populations, so sedimentation and eelgrass decline might not be correlated.

The group felt that the program's effort is addressing the causes of the decline but that more effort needs to be made to tell a more complete story of the breadth of efforts being conducted. A suggestion was made to possibly reframe the 2018 eelgrass report to present this. Lexie commented that our reports are thorough and give a lot of detail because that is what our scientific audience wants. Rather than re-organizing the technical reports, the program could create a brief one to two-page document that tells the complete story and presents our overall approach to eelgrass monitoring, restoration, and research. Staff will set as an action item to consider a brief document and will report back in August at the next meeting.

Vote: Marshall moved to approve. Bruce seconded. All in favor.

6. **ACTION:** Recommendations on Community Project Application (see attached)

Staff reviewed the Community Project application from the San Luis Obispo Marine Protected Area (MPA) Collaborative to design and print a Spanish version of a recently-completed kids' activity booklet.

Questions came up about other MPAs and their outreach efforts. Each area has their own approach to education and outreach that might include educational programming, public service announcements, etc.

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

7. **DISCUSSION:** Presentation of Semi-annual Report (see attached)

Staff described the purpose of the semi-annual report, which is to provide an update of Estuary Program progress on the Workplan for the year. The 320 grants are awarded each year, and there is a five-year grant period. Unused funds can be rolled over during that five-year period. For the grant cycle that began in FY17, 70% of the awarded funding has been spent. We're happy with this percent spent amount because it's good to keep up spending rather than leaving too much funding until the end of the five-year period. The group thanked staff for their thorough and timely reports.

8. **DISCUSSION:** Program Evaluation Letter Update (see attached)

The EC requests periodic updates on the status of the corrective actions listed in the letter from EPA summarizing their review of the Estuary Program in 2015. The staff has been very focused on update of the CCMP, which is slated to be completed in 2020. Staff have made good progress on all items in the letter and feel on-track to have completely addressed all items before the 2020 Program Evaluation. Staff commented that these five-year visits are valuable because they're a chance to show EPA what we're doing in a way that doesn't come across in reports. It's also a chance for EPA to meet our partners and better understand those important relationships.

The next update will be made at the November 2019 EC meeting.

9. **DISCUSSION:** Program Highlights

- **Ocean Acidification Funding:** EPA had additional funding available for NEPs to support projects related to nutrients in FY20. This included projects involving ocean acidification (OA). Dr. Emily Bockmon of Cal Poly's Chemistry Department has been conducting studies of pH and carbonate chemistry in Morro Bay over the past year, and we partnered with her to apply for \$25,000 to support the purchase of OA equipment. We were awarded \$25,000 for the equipment purchase of two pH sensors. We worked with Dr. Bockmon to update our QAPP and Workplan to include this new monitoring effort. Monitoring will occur throughout FY20, with a report to be completed at the end of the year.
- **Eelgrass Updates:** The Estuary Program successfully completed eelgrass transplanting in February and March. Initial monitoring indicated that the February transplants were suffering, and this was thought to be due to the stormy weather which followed the transplanting work. High winds and rains would have contributed to higher turbidity, which could have shaded out the new transplants. Additional monitoring of the transplants will continue to track their progress. Planning is underway to apply for the permit to support transplanting efforts in 2020. A bathymetry survey is slated for the spring. NOAA is contributing \$25,000 to the effort to fund the installation of tide stations, which allows for the calculation of tidal prism for comparison to historical measurements.
- **Microplastics Monitoring:** The Estuary Program developed curriculum, an outdoor collection activity, and lab analysis to monitor for microplastics on Coleman Beach. We partnered with the Morro Bay High School (MBHS) freshman science teachers so that all 180 freshmen could participate. We plan to continue this monitoring each year with MBHS students, allowing for continued science education opportunities and development of a long-running data set. We were motivated to develop this curriculum because we had originally done a microplastics blog post in 2015 that was very popular, as have been subsequent posts on the topic. It helps people understand why they should pick up their trash.
- **Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve Updates:** This week Lexie has been conducted interviews to select a contractor for the project. Carolyn is currently out of the office until she has her baby. We had five bids submitted in response to our Request for Proposals (RFP). We feel that we had a good variety of firms, with some small, some large, some local, and one that specializes in restoration work. We have three proposals that are solid, so it will be a tough decision. We finished interviews today and are trying to get a contract underway soon so work can start July 1. We have engineering support lined up with ESA, the firm that designed the project. We also hired Precision Construction to support the RFP and bid process. We plan to contract with them for further support for the construction stage of the project. We are also hiring an interim restoration projects manager, Philip LaFollette who retired from the California Conservation Corps and did a lot of Project Clearwater work. He has experience with on-the-ground work and will be a good fit. Most of his work will start in July with the construction.

10. Adjourn at 5:10 to next meeting of August 14, 2019 at 4:00 pm at the Estuary Program offices.

Attachments:

- Minutes from February 13, 2019 EC meeting
- Community Projects Application
- FY20 Workplan
- FY19 Semi-annual report
- Program Evaluation Status Report