

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

Prepared for the Executive Committee Meeting in November 2019

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 include in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2018, FY2019, and FY2020 Workplans. It is also included in the FY2020 Workplan draft.

- Hired two interns to assist with the process of assessing our progress toward completing Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) Action Plans. They analyzed the 2012 version of the CCMP, reviewed the latest EPA guidance on CCMP updates, and compiled a database to assess Action Plan status. This work was completed over the summer of 2018. In the fall of 2018, a third intern was hired to complete the process of updating the Action Plans. Several changes were identified where Action Plans were being eliminated, updated, or combined with other Action Plans. This intern also assisted with the update of the Monitoring Plan and the Communication Plan, which are two companion documents to the CCMP.
- All edits to the CCMP are complete. Will be working with a graphic designer this winter to compile the document for distribution in early 2020.
- Continued with the conservation planning work, which will inform the CCMP update process. Continued to make progress on the document, with a draft expected in early 2020.
- All update efforts are following the most recent EPA guidance, which is titled *National Estuary Program Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan Revision and Update Guidelines May 3, 2016*.

CCMP Progress Report

Status: Ongoing

EPA encourages the Estuary Program to provide status updates and tracking information when we next update our CCMP. For the 2013 CCMP revision, we created a “CCMP Tracking Table” that provided the status of the plan. For the 2020 CCMP update, our planning interns created a database documenting Action Plan status, which is more detailed approach and supports long-term tracking of the status of the plan. EPA also encourage us to continue to issue annual reports to help the public and partners understand how we are working toward our goals. CCMP update efforts (see CCMP Update section) are preparing us for this step. We have created an Annual Report each year to document our work and progress toward goals.

Communication Plan Updates

Status: Ongoing

The Executive Director and Communications and Outreach Coordinator have nearly completed an update of the FY19 to FY22 Communication Plan. The draft document has been reviewed by the Management Committee. We are finalizing the document, which is expected to be ready by early 2020.

EPA recommends that the plan identify target audiences, activities or project descriptions, deliverables, and their estimated timelines linked specifically to CCMP Action Plans. They also recommend identifying the lead parties responsible for implementation and estimating the funding needed. They are also interested in behavior change evaluation activities being included in the plan. The Estuary Program addressed all of these items in our current Communication Plan update.

Finance Plan

Status: Ongoing

EPA recommends that the Estuary Program update its Finance Plan. They were pleased with the increase in donations resulting from efforts up to the time of the PE review. EPA recommended creating more readily accessible information on the website about the program's accomplishments. The updated website content has been developed, and the web developer has completed page creation. The page will be launched on the Estuary Program website in early 2020. Work on the Finance Plan is scheduled for 2019 and 2020.

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) and aligned with the CCMP and State of the Bay Report. 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. Based on comments and feedback from EPA Headquarters, we revised the Monitoring Plan and submitted an updated version to our Regional Project Manager in January. We plan to review the document on an annual basis.

Species Protection Plan

Status: Ongoing

EPA wants 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 consulted our partners to gather information on this and to create a project 'wish' list. The draft Conservation Planning Initiative (CPI) is under development and expected to be completed in early 2020, with draft review ongoing through the spring.

Measurable CCMP Objectives

Status: Ongoing

EPA wants to see the Estuary Program develop objectives tied to Action Plans that lend themselves to quantitative measurement. As part of the CCMP update process (see CCMP Update section), efforts are underway to complete the Conservation Planning Initiative (CPI). As part of this process, we are working with partners and Technical Advisory Committees to identify either measurable objectives or the studies and research needed to develop them. This information from the CPI will inform CCMP implementation. Measurable objectives, when feasible, will be included in the next CCMP revision.

Reporting on Changes in Conditions and Outcomes: Assessing the Monitoring Effort

Status: Completed, with annual updates

As previously reported, EPA encourages the program to continue its ongoing evaluation of the Monitoring Program for both ambient conditions and project results. The Monitoring Program conducts a review of the monitoring sites and protocols to update the annual monitoring workplan, the latest of which was completed for 2019. This is an internal document that 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.

Reporting on Changes in Conditions and Outcomes: Sharing Environmental Results

Status: Ongoing

EPA encourages the Estuary Program to continue to capture and publicly display tangible monitoring 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 FY19. The events focused on fish, the role of biota in restoration and ecosystem health, and oyster aquaculture, clams, and native oysters. We also hosted this talk series in FY18. Plans are underway for a talk series in FY20, with the topics of eelgrass, bay health, and creek health.
- We completed 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 and installed an updated wildlife viewing exhibit for the Nature Center. It includes an interpretive panel and two viewing scopes.
- We continue to compile data for reports and memos to share them with partners and the public. Recent products include the 2018 Bioassessment Memo, the 2018 Creek Health Memo, the 2018 Estuary Health Memo, and the 2018 Eelgrass Report.
- 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 starting with 2018 Workplan.

Climate Change: Climate Vulnerability Assessment

Status: Ongoing

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

included assessing each Action Plan with the climate vulnerability assessment. This work has been completed as part of the CCMP update process.

Monitoring: Develop a Monitoring Plan

Status: Completed, with annual updates

As previously reported, EPA wants to see a Monitoring Plan, separate from the program Quality Assurance Project Plan, that meets 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. Based on comments and feedback from EPA Headquarters, we revised the Monitoring Plan and submitted an updated version to our Regional Project Manager in January. We plan to review the document on an annual basis.

Eelgrass Restoration: 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 by partnering on research, monitoring, and restoration. Cal Poly continued research efforts focused on water quality, wildlife disturbance to eelgrass, etc. With a grant from CDFW, the Estuary Program conducted another round of experimental transplanting based on the results of the planting work in 2017, 2018, and 2019. Monitoring of the transplant areas have provided valuable feedback on the best timing, methods, and locations for restoration. This iterative adaptive management effort allows us to work toward long-term eelgrass restoration goals. 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 has included drone mapping of eelgrass, water quality studies, eelgrass health tracking, and sediment analysis. To support the hydrodynamic modeling effort, the Estuary Program was awarded funding from EPA and US Fish and Wildlife Service to conduct a baywide bathymetry survey which took place in the spring of 2019. This updated bay elevation data set informs eelgrass restoration efforts as well as populates the Sea Grant hydrodynamic model.

Nutrient and Sediment Reductions: 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 recently-completed 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.

- The Estuary Program was awarded a Resource Legacy Fund grant to support CSLRCD efforts to work directly with private landowners and develop implementation projects on private property. The grant was completed in late FY19 and was successful in identifying several potential projects on private land. The next step is to pursue funding to support these projects.