



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

November 20, 2019
4:00 pm

Minutes

Attendees: Jennifer Epp, *Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board*; Emily Bockmon, *Cal Poly*; Jeff Heller, *City of Morro Bay*; Marshall Ochylski, *LOCS*D; Jason Curtis, *Bay Foundation*; Tim Duff, *California Coastal Conservancy*; John Flaherty, *Central Coast Outdoors*; Ethan Bell, *Stillwater Sciences*; Suzanne Marr, *USEPA*; Ann Kitajima, *MBNEP Staff*; Lexie Bell, *MBNEP Staff*.

1. Introductions and Updates

- Jason Curtis: No updates from the Bay Foundation.
- Ethan Bell: Surveying identified over 250 steelhead in Chorro Creek, with the numbers up since last year and dramatically up since 2017. The juveniles seem to be rebounding. Stillwater Sciences captured over 200 pikeminnow, some of which were very large. There are still many pikeminnow left. The numbers appeared to be down in some areas, but that could be due to the time of year of the work since they are monitoring later than in past years. Ethan feels that the current approach is managing but not eliminating pikeminnow. He would like to do some management work this spring using volunteer anglers.
- John Flaherty: The winter bird festival is coming up in January. Not much happening out on the water lately, although the eelgrass is looking good and he's starting to see Brant geese out on the bay.
- Becka Kelly: Hunting season has started. It's important for us to let our volunteers know. They are keeping an eye on the forecast, as rain is expected and they are concerned about bacteria levels in the bay.
- Ann Kitajima: The California Men's Colony (CMC) Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) had a spill the week before. The report that came through originally said 30,000 gallons had spilled. A subsequent follow-up report corrected that to 6,000 gallons. The spill was due to a failure by their UV disinfection system. Thus, the discharged effluent had undergone all treatment stages except disinfection. We knew about it because we receive the Office of Emergency Services spill reports for our region and because CMC staff called us to notify us.
- Jeff Heller: No updates from the city.
- Lexie Bell: There's been news coverage on the Today Show about the otters released in Morro Bay. The Morro Bay Aquarium brought three otters from their rehab program to Morro Bay to release them back to the wild. They are trying out Morro Bay as a release area. The Harbor Patrol assisted with the release. One of the otters is climbing onto people's kayaks and paddleboards because it doesn't have a fear of humans. The Monterey Bay researchers are trying to "haze" it so it learns to be cautious around humans. They haven't had to pick it up and take it back to their rehab facility yet.
- Jennifer Epp: Information on sewage spills would also be available from Water Board staff. CMC likely has to collect a lot of data related to the spill, and it would be publicly available. The Region 3 Executive Officer is retiring in early 2020. Jennifer will be leaving the EC in February. Matt Keeling will be the Water Board representative, with Tamara Anderson continuing as the alternate. We asked for an update on the CMC WWTP permit, and Jennifer reached out to Phil Hammer. He responded that the draft permit will be released in January 2020 with a public comment period in May.
- Suzanne Marr: No updates from EPA.
- Marshall Ochylski: The Los Osos Community Services District (LOCS)D has hired a new General Manager, Ron Munds, who has been on the job for about one and a half months. Rob Miller recently retired as the Executive Director for the Basin Management Committee. They have hired Dan Heimel of Water Systems Consulting to take over as Executive Director.

- Tim Duff: He is working with the Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District (CSLRCD) on the Los Osos wetlands restoration project on what was formerly the Morrissey property. They have applied to US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) for a Coastal Wetlands Grant to implement restoration planning. There is word at the staff level of a tentative award of \$500,000. They will hear formally in early 2020. In the meantime, Tim is asking the Coastal Conservancy board for \$185,000 for completing the final plans, conducting environmental review, and obtaining permits. Tomorrow he is meeting with the Estuary Program at the Ecological Reserve to have a look at the project and discuss potential projects to apply to the Coastal Wetlands Grant program in the spring.
- Emily Bockman: Cal Poly is flying the position for a Sea Grant Specialist to facilitate research in the area. The hire is being managed by Cal Poly's biology department and that is where the person will be housed once a selection has been made. The job posting is asking for experience in aquaculture.

2. Public Comment – None presented.

3. Agenda Revisions – None presented.

4. **ACTION:** Consider Approval of August 14, 2019 EC meeting minutes.

Vote: Jason motioned to approve, Ethan seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

5. **ACTION:** Recommend approval of Community Project Application (see attached)

The application was from California State Parks (CSP) to build a watershed protector demonstration station and develop the accompanying curriculum. The applicant demonstrated that the project would have a large reach and that it would earn a fair amount of match.

Vote: Marshall moved to approve the application. Jeff seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

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

Every six months, the Estuary Program creates a semi-annual report laying out all of the work completed during the past six months. This reporting helps EPA assess if our Workplan tasks are being met. The report for April 1 through September 30, 2019 was completed and submitted to the EC for review. We discussed the amount spent and the match earned. The Estuary Program is exceeding its match requirement to date after completing the third year of the five-year grant cycle.

7. **DISCUSSION:** Comprehensive Conservation & Management Plan Update Process

The Comprehensive Conservation & Management Plan (CCMP) update process continues. The document has been updated and the next steps are graphic design, a survey of the Technical Advisory Committees, and finalizing the document to distribute to partners in early 2020. All work has been conducted per EPA's guidance for CCMP updating and revisions. This process was reviewed and approved by Suzanne Marr. She provided some feedback on how to best document some of work, but overall she was very positive about our process. The effort has had valuable support from our Environmental Planning interns, which have all been students from Cal Poly's City and Regional Planning Department.

The draft will come before the EC in February.

The Program Evaluation (PE) is coming up in 2020, and our goal is to get the CCMP to the approved draft or final stage in time for the PE.

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

Twice a year, the EC requested an update on the status of the corrective actions listed in the PE letter that was completed in early 2016. The Estuary Program has made progress in all areas, as described in the attached document.

This is an overview of the status of some of the corrective actions:

- The CCMP update is a big part of what EPA wants accomplished, and we are on track to complete this for the 2020 site visit.
- Partnership with the CSLRCD partnership: We have been working with the CSLRCD through a Resources Legacy Fund grant from a private foundation. The funding was used for a partnership with the CSLRCD to do landowner outreach around projects to improve water quality. This effort was a great partnership because we have capacity to get grants, and the CSLRCD has a closer connection with landowners. So they did a lot of individual landowner meetings, resulting in concept designs for several projects on private property. It can be difficult to find time to develop the projects. Now that we have concept designs, we are in a better position to apply for funding, possibly from the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Clean Water Act 319(h) grants, and others.

At the PE in 2020, EPA will conduct a thorough review of our program and whether program guidelines are being met. We compile a package that we submit prior to their visit, recording our progress against performance measures used for all NEPs. This is due by March 16, and the site visit will be this summer. This is a robust review process that results in a letter stating what your program is doing well and where you need improvement. The letter also states whether the program passes, conditionally passes, or fails. We have always passed. The NEPs all take it very seriously and remind EPA Headquarters to be careful what it puts in their letter. We will have an Executive Director from the San Francisco NEP as part of the process to give a broader view and input. Also attending are Suzanne from the Region 9 EPA office and at least one member from EPA Headquarters in DC. At the site visit in the summer, we'll have an event where this committee can meet the EPA representatives so they have an opportunity to talk to you and get your perspective on how the NEP is doing.

9. DISCUSSION: Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve (CCER) update

The Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve construction is now complete and the temporary road crossing has been removed. All grading of side channels and installation of erosion control is completed, ahead of schedule and under budget. During removal of the temporary creek crossing, Stillwater was our fisheries biologist on site and cleared the area of fish to ensure no fish were harmed. We did not have to dewater for that process, and it went very smoothly. We had an interim period until beginning of November where we were watering willow baffles and mattress. In November, we started the planting portion to improve habitat. We are working with the California Conservation Corps (CCC), primarily funded by our CA Coastal Conservancy grant, and the work is going well. The CCC grew all of the plants specifically for us, so they are high quality plants from seed collected in the watershed. This should go on for a few more weeks. The soil is really compacted, so it's a challenge to work as quickly as planned so planting will probably go into December. Since we haven't gotten any rain yet, there have been no weather delays. Lexie shared a few photos of erosion control measures showing waddles, erosion control fabric, hydroseeding, willow baffles, and temporary willow stakes to slow flow until the willow baffles are established. The contractor completed drill seeding in flat areas, with straw on top to keep it in place. Willow mattresses were installed along the sloped edge to stabilize it. There were two hydroseeding seed mixes – one for upland and one for riparian areas. The mixes were developed by ESA. The drone images were acquired by Kevin Cooper, who is retired from the US Forest Service. The drone image is for documenting and monitoring. He'll come back as plants grow in. We will be monitoring plant survival. We confirmed that the waddles aren't wrapped in plastic, which unfortunately are used commonly. Although they are advertised as photo degradable, they actually aren't and end up creating plastic waste and ensnaring wildlife.

10. DISCUSSION: Program Highlights

- **Monitoring Updates:** The topobathy lidar survey was completed, and staff shared an initial map showing changes in elevation over the past decade. Staff also described the upcoming stormwater runoff monitoring to be conducted by Tetra Tech at the State Park Marina parking lot prior to construction.
- **Eelgrass Updates:** Monitoring of the 2019 eelgrass transplanting effort was conducted by Tenera Environmental. Thus far they were seeing better survival of plants from the March planting as compared to the February planting, like due to the stormy weather that preceded and immediately followed the February work. We are awaiting the results of the six-month monitoring of the March transplants. We are in the process of working with the California Department of Fish & Wildlife to develop the permit for restoration work in 2020.
- **Education & Outreach Updates:** We hosted a CCER tour and volunteer appreciation party in November, with approximately 30 attendees. We had our event at Red Barn to recognize two volunteers: Betsy Kinter was our Monitoring Program Volunteer awardee, and Gary Ruggerone was our Community Volunteer awardee. Betsy conducts bacteria monitoring for us as well as helping out in many other program areas. Gary is a Bay Foundation member who has supported us in numerous ways over the years. We are continuing our work on the State of the Bay (SOTB) report, to be released in spring 2020. We are hosting a series of events to share the results of the report throughout spring 2020. We reduced the number of events from 2017 so that we could focus more time and effort on advertising and outreach to the events to increase the attendance. Our top three events will be SOTB talks as part of our Science Exploration Series, focused on eelgrass, Bay Health, and Creek Health. We'll share the dates and calendar once available, so please help us spread the word. We will also host a Pick-up and Paddle Event and will partner with other groups on hikes to get people outside and seeing the watershed.

11. Adjourn at 5:07 to next meeting of February 19, 2020 at 4:00 pm at the Estuary Program offices.

Attachments:

- Minutes from August 14, 2019 EC meeting
- Community Project application
- Semi-annual report
- Program Evaluation status