



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

February 19, 2020
4:00 pm

Minutes

Attendees: Jennifer Epp, *Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board*; Matt Keeling, *Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board*; Bill Henry, *Bay Foundation*; Tim Duff, *California Coastal Conservancy*; John Flaherty, *Central Coast Outdoors*; Trudy O'Brien, *Central Coast Women for Fisheries*; Becka Kelly, *Morro Bay Harbor Department*; Bruce Gibson, *SLO County*; Suzanne Marr, *USEPA*; Ann Kitajima, *MBNEP Staff*; Lexie Bell, *MBNEP Staff*.

1. Introductions and Updates

- Tim: Work is currently underway now to complete work on a property referred to as the Morrissey property with a grant from U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) through the National Coastal Wetlands Grant Program. Tim thanked for the Estuary Program for their support for the effort.
- Becka: Vistra Energy has withdrawn their permit to do battery storage on the Morro Bay power plant property. Several lease sites have building going on. The old aquarium currently going through renovations, and the plan is for a brewery to move in until future aquarium moves in. This is expected to be about a five-year time period. A few other lease sites are building hotels and upgrading waterfront properties. It's mostly been a quiet winter for the Harbor Department.
- Trudy: Black cod is the focus of local fisheries right now. The crab fishery is winding down, and it was not a great season. The SLO Film Festival is happening soon and will be showing a film on fishing, focused mainly on the east coast. Jeremiah will be doing a Q&A session at the event.
- Bill: No additional updates from the Bay Foundation.
- Bruce: The Los Osos Water Reclamation Facility is over 99% connected, only 40 properties that have issues, so they are working through that process. Bruce is working at the state level on a few things, including a working group with the Coastal Commission. This began after the workshop with the Coastal Commission last summer to talk about mutual issues/conflicts. The main topics were short term vacation rentals and sea level rise (SLR) and figuring out ways that local jurisdiction and the Commission could work together to get things done on resiliency, including SLR adaptation.
- John: The Winter Bird Festival in January had almost 700 attendees, a record attendance. John ran into George Trevelyan of Grassy Bar Oyster Company, who is trying to get his depuration facility going on the waterfront. He says he's close to getting it up and running.
- Suzanne: EPA now has a new Regional Administrator, John Busterud, who was head attorney at PG&E and Army Reserves. Folks who know him say that he's good to work with. He did an intro chat today with staff. The Clean Water Act Section 320 funding for NEPs is now figured out. We are getting ready for our Program Evaluation later this year.
- Lexie: We found out we have funding for NEPs, with an increase to our EPA grant to bring us to \$662,500 for next year. It's helpful for budgeting purposes if the NEP is authorized. An authorization bill passed the House but hasn't gone to the Senate yet. Rehabilitated otters were recently released here by Monterey Bay Aquarium. There has not been a lot of outreach on this yet to public. They released three otters here, originally found within 40 miles of Morro Bay. Two are still here, and one was sick

and had to be taken back to Monterey. They used to release in Elkhorn Slough, but that area has reached capacity so now they're releasing here. They are limited to only releasing otters here that were found within 40 miles of Morro Bay. The annual Association of National Estuary Program (ANEP) meeting is coming up in March in DC. We meet with EPA Headquarters and the other NEPs and visit with Congressional reps and staff members.

- Matt Keeling: He is taking over as EC representative for the Water Board for Jennifer, as this is her last meeting. He is currently the Assistant Executive Officer. As of April 1, Matt will be the Executive Officer. This is his 20th year with the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (CCRWQCB.)
- Jennifer: In reviewing agenda items for December and January, Jennifer found a few items of interest for our watershed. There is an update on the drinking water testing program, region-wide, now available for people who have wells, either an individual one or a system of 14 or less people. They've been doing this type of work since 2017. They'd tested about 276 wells and of those, 38% have had at least one exceedance of a pollutant. The Bay Foundation manages funding for this, which originally came from a Supplemental Environmental Project. No formal well testing has been done in the Morro Bay watershed, although they ran some testing in a pilot program a few years ago working with SLO County. The CCRWQCB is beginning their plan to update their permits for the larger wastewater systems that discharge to land. For our watershed, that's the Los Osos facility. They have 45 of those permits throughout the region, and they are trying to make the permits all uniform. The Los Osos Water Reclamation Facility permit won't have too many changes since it's a relatively newer permit. For the older permits, they are trying to get them up to date so that all dischargers will have relative parity with respect to monitoring and reporting requirements and receiving water requirements. Staff and the board discussed PFOS, emerging contaminant found in water. They are trying to learn more about where it is, how bad it is, and how to regulate it. It comes from Teflon products from waterproofing, firefighting foam, etc., so they are focusing on at airports, landfills, industrial sites, etc. Municipal wastewater influent and effluent is the next step. As for Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), there have been no resources or clearly defined role set for the Regional Boards for this statewide effort.

2. Public Comment – None presented.

3. Agenda Revisions – None presented.

4. **ACTION:** Consider Approval of November 20, 2019 EC meeting minutes (see attached)

Vote: Becka motioned to approve, Bill seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

5. **ACTION:** Election of EC Chair and Vice Chair and Approval of Members

Jennifer is rotating out, and Matt will be her replacement. Ethan has expressed an interest in serving as Chairperson. He was interested formerly but wanted to serve longer on the committee before taking on the role. Kristin is currently out on family leave for the rest of the academic year, but would like to remain in the Vice Chair position.

Vote: Bruce moves to approve Ethan Bell as the Chairperson. Becka seconds. All in favor. None opposed.

Alexis Pasulka has been selected as Emily Bockmon's alternate until Kristin Hardy and Crowe White return from family leave. Virginia Flaherty has been selected as the alternate for John Flaherty for the Tourism Interest Seat. Bruce asked that Blake Fixler, the Legislative Assistant for District 2, be considered as his alternate as he has a regular commitment on EC meeting dates that would preclude him from attending all meetings.

Vote: Bill moves to nominate Alexis, Virginia, and Blake as alternates. Bruce seconds. All in favor. None opposed.

6. DISCUSSION: FY2021 Workplan Input (see attached)

The NEPs were awarded some additional funding for FY2021. We are planning on spending a little bit on temporary staff to give us more monitoring capacity as well as for an environmental planning intern. We could consider additional staff if future budget amounts continue to be increased. So our personnel costs are stable and since we are in a three-year lease, we are not expecting any big operating budget changes in the near future.

We are trying to pick projects that we think are priorities for the program but can be challenging to fund in other ways. An example of this is Pikeminnow management.

Bruce says these all sound like good ideas but wants to know if there is any information on why eelgrass declined. Lexie explained that our proposed habitat suitability model supports this. The model would provide information indicating where it makes sense to plant eelgrass in the future. We are seeing some increase in acreage, so we continue to track water quality to see if we can determine how changing conditions might impact eelgrass. Eelgrass restoration has been small scale so that we can continue to learn from it. We now feel ready to do larger scale restoration, so we need the habitat suitability information so that we can expand our efforts.

We're happy to get more feedback or if you think of other ideas, let us know. We can incorporate them into the Workplan for review at our May meeting.

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

We aren't spending as much Restoration Funds as planned, particularly in the Implementation and Land Protection categories. We had requested funding to support Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve (CCER) construction, but we are underspent and have been able to utilize outside funding for construction. We might need that Restoration Funding if the plants don't survive and we have to replant. But currently we are under-budget so we might not need the Restoration Funds.

There has been no spending so far on land conservation as there have been no opportunities for projects. The monies not spent can be carried forward. There is one landowner interested in an easement, but the Land Conservancy is not sure of the ability to get funding as the development potential is low on the parcel. The landowner is re-leasing the property for three years, so he is not interested in an easement at this time.

There's been some discussion between the Coastal Conservancy and the Land Conservancy regarding parcels on Warden Creek above the Morrissey property. Nothing has been determined, but there is some potential. Tim and the Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District (CSLRCD) talked about applying for a federal coastal wetlands grant this summer to fund it. It would be great to have some matching funds from the Estuary Program, if it goes through.

Another area with some potential for conservation is to collaborate with the County to see what's happening with land conservation in Los Osos. Lexie will meet with Kerry Brown to discuss. Bruce said it would be an interesting conversation, including taking a look at the community plan. The County thinks they are close to having Habitat Conservation Plan done with USFWS, so then they can do infill development and mitigate on property around Broderson on the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) property.

We have not spent the \$10k set aside for Implementation for 2019 and 2020.

8. DISCUSSION: Program Evaluation Update

The Program Evaluation (PE) is an important process to remain eligible to receive our 320 funding. It is also a good opportunity for EPA Headquarters folks to see the kinds of things we do, meet our partners, and see our work. We usually do well in the process. We're just giving the EC a heads up on dates for the summer. The site visit is July 15 and 16. There will be an opportunity for EPA visitors to meet with the EC and Bay Foundation, likely a lunch or field tour to get a chance for EPA to ask questions.

We have been tracking the PE recommendations from EPA's 2015 visit and reporting on them twice a year to the EC. Suzanne, Gail Louie (from Region 9), and Nancy Laurson (from Headquarters) are expected. It's a great opportunity to showcase what we're doing.

9. DISCUSSION: Comprehensive Conservation & Management Plan Update Process

The Comprehensive Conservation & Management Plan (CCMP) update process continues. The document has been updated, including input from the Technical Advisory Committees (TAC). Staff have completed accompanying subplans including the Monitoring Plan, the Communication Plan, and the Finance Plan. The Finance Plan was approved by the Bay Foundation, as they serve as the bursar for the Estuary Program.

These documents are ready to submit to EPA Headquarters for their review and approval. The final step will be to share the updated plan with partners.

10. DISCUSSION: Community Project Revamp Discussion

This is one of the programs that the EC is very involved in. This is our program to provide support to community groups on projects that we lack the expertise or capacity to do. Some past projects included supporting snowy plover signs, docent programs, projects with Cal Poly like wildlife cameras, etc. It's a good program, but it's a very time intensive program to manage as it often involves working with entities that don't have experience managing funding. They are not very large awards, but we find that they can require a lot of work.

Three ideas to revamp the program:

- Increase funding to \$10,000 maximum. Gives us more bang for our buck.
- Only offer opportunity once a year, giving us more time to manage the projects and more time to solicit projects.
- Create a list of "qualified partners" rather than an application approach. Some private foundations do this. Gives us a more hands on opportunity to be collaborative.

We are seeking feedback from the EC on these changes. Bruce says everyone struggles with this as you have to give out money that is going to be used effectively without requiring a lot of time to manage it. All three ideas seem good. The list of qualified partners is something that we could advertise to see if others are interested. We could update our website to reach out to interested organizations.

Becka liked all three suggestions.

No one had objections to the proposal. We will bring a more formal description of the new process to the EC at a future meeting to discuss and approve.

Tim agrees with what's been said about the pros of the three proposed ideas. The Coastal Conservancy also finds small grants programs to be frustrating as they are a lot of work for staff to manage.

Jennifer has a thought on a potential type of project. There might be opportunities for some trash reduction from some of the businesses on the Embarcadero. For example, at Pebble Beach volunteers went in SCUBA gear and collected waste. This resulted in programs to better manage waste. Business owners if presented with that information might work to reduce waste.

11. **DISCUSSION:** Program Highlights

- **Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve:** We are currently monitoring for geomorphology under our Coastal Conservancy grant, conducting flow monitoring in the new side channels, and developing outreach content for our Nature Center and other venues. Potentially we will need a plan for supplemental watering. Some onsite wells were rehabilitated as part of the project to do watering in early fall, so we have that option out there.
- **Eelgrass:** Eelgrass transplanting is now happening with our PMEP grant. We are utilizing AmeriCorps Watershed Stewards Project members to help out. The baywide eelgrass acreage map was flown in November. The final eelgrass map is expected in April. Cal Poly did one at the same time with their drone. Their method came up with about 30 acres of eelgrass.
- **Sea Grant Project:** The project is wrapping up, with an agency meeting in December and a public meeting in January to share the results. At least one published paper will be created, expected to be completed later this year.
- **E&O Updates:** The 2020 State of the Bay report is now complete. Please take a copy. We are developing additional online content that will be available soon. Please join us at events throughout the spring. If you'd like us to present at an upcoming service club or organization meeting, please let us know.

12. Adjourn at 5:41 to next meeting of May 20, 2020 at 4:00 pm at the Estuary Program offices.

Attachments:

- Minutes from November 20, 2019 EC meeting
- FY2020 Workplan
- Restoration Funding Spending Plan (approved August 2017)