



### Minutes

**Attendees:** Matt Keeling, *Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board*; Kristin Hardy, *Cal Poly*; Jeff Heller, *City of Morro Bay*; Marshall Ochylski, *LOCSO*; Bill Henry, *Bay Foundation*; Sam Schuchat, *California Coastal Conservancy*; John Flaherty, *Central Coast Outdoors*; Ethan Bell, *Stillwater Sciences*; Trudy O'Brien, *Central Coast Women for Fisheries*; Bruce Gibson, *San Luis Obispo County*; Becka Kelly, *Morro Bay Harbor Department*; Suzanne Marr, *USEPA*; Ayla-Louise Mateo, *MBNEP Staff*; Ann Kitajima, *MBNEP Staff*; Lexie Bell, *MBNEP Staff*.

#### 1. Introductions and Updates

- Trudy O'Brien: People are selling fish off their boats at the dock when possible. Central Coast Women for Fisheries puts out an email if you're on their list saying who has fish and when. Hasn't been a lot of activity, but has been some.
- Bill Henry: The Bay Foundation approved the revised Restoration Fund spending plan that we'll be considering today. He participated in the virtual site visit with the EPA Program Evaluation (PE) review team. The review went well, and EPA is happy with the Estuary Program's performance. They indicated that our NEP will pass the evaluation. The Bay Foundation continues to support NEP staff throughout COVID era that we're in, with flexibility that they need to work at home, additional paid time off through a federal program, etc.
- Kristin Hardy: She just returned from a sabbatical and maternity over the past year, so no updates at this time.
- Ayla-Louise Mateo: Environmental planning intern for Estuary Program. Working on updating our Climate Vulnerability Assessment.
- Sam Schuchat: Between people being on leave, etc., the State Coastal Conservancy is down 15 to 20% of their normal workforce right now. They will have a Board meeting in two weeks to consider grants applications.
- John Flaherty: Busiest summer ever this year in terms of kayak tours. A lot of other tourism related businesses in area have also been exceptionally busy. Needed extra staff to get through the summer. Great to see, but also kind of puzzling. Many Californians want to get out and do things but don't want to go too far, so coming to places like Morro Bay. Seeing so much eelgrass this year, in places that haven't seen it in years. Really encouraging to see the recovery.
- Bruce Gibson: Most of his work now is related to COVID and the budget and economic impacts of COVID. One issue with potential impact on the estuary is the encampment of homeless people in the area. He's been hearing from a lot of constituents about the issue. It's challenging to deal with fiscally, legally, etc. The County is concerned about waste issues (human waste, syringes, etc.), and it is something they will continue to work on.
- Matt Keeling: Water Board, similar to other entities, is struggling with COVID related economic and budget constraints. They're operating with a 15 to 20% workforce and are still determining how this impacts ability to do their work. At the May EC meeting, Tamara had mentioned ongoing settlement negotiations with California Department of Corrections' (DOC) California Men's Colony Wastewater Treatment Plant (CMC WWTP) overflows to Chorro Creek in Dec 2015 and Jan 2017. The violations were settled in confidential civil negotiations with a \$170,000 settlement. The DOC will be implementing enhanced compliance actions by installing 13 smart manhole covers with monitoring capacity that detects when there's a back-up in collection system lines and alerts staff. These will be placed between CMC and the WWTP along Chorro Creek over the next few years. Part of the reason for the spills is that lockdowns in the prison lead to protest flushing of items down toilets. This causes clogs in the collection system and results in spills unless staff can clear them first with vac trucks. At

the Water Board meeting on May 28, the CMC's updated NPDES permit was approved. It was a standard permit update during the five-year cycle. The major changes were: removed effluent limits since testing showed they were no longer necessary (nitrate, chlorine residual) and added phthalate esters to permit. They are still monitoring for those constituents in case they become a problem in the future. Nitrate was removed from the effluent limits because CMC has demonstrated that their system is effective at total nitrogen removal. Limits for chlorine residual were removed since CMC is no longer using chlorine disinfection since a UV system was installed. Chlorine is only a backup now when needed. The permit also added influent monitoring for salts and other minerals since some of ongoing effluent limit violations are associated with sodium chloride. They are trying to get a better idea of the sources and address them with source control before they get to the plant. At the July 16 Water Board meeting, they adopted the NPDES permit for the community of Cayucos. The Morro Bay WWTP needs to upgrade by 2023 to go full secondary and to move the plant out of the flood zone. Cayucos decided to create their own plant, currently under construction near the former Estero Chevron marine terminal. They worked to include special provisions for future recycling of effluent to reduce ocean discharge. The facility is going to be treating to tertiary standards. The Morro Bay WWTP is under construction off Highway 1. The Water Board will be agendaizing that in the next year or two depending on plant completion. Suzanne asked if the Water Board had an approach for homeless and water quality issues. Staff began engaging with stakeholders last October and collaborated with nonprofits and local agencies to address the core issues of homelessness rather than trying to deal with the resulting water quality problems. They are working with the State Water Resources Control Board to try to get broader statewide coordination.

- Suzanne Marr: No updates from EPA.
  - Jeff Heller: Morro Bay has been inundated with visitors in a way we never have before, and a great deal of trash is generated, in particular from takeout containers. He's worked with volunteers to keep trash out of the bay. The City added some trash cans and hired an additional part-time employee. But they've had to lay off several employees due to the economic downturn. It is not clear if the visitor influx will impact bed tax and sales tax revenue since hotels have had to reduce rates to attract visitors.
  - Becka Kelly: One of the busier summers we've had with record numbers of beach goers. They are seeing a lot of the sea stars that had formerly been impacted by wasting disease. They are working on keeping trash out of the bay and limiting the number of derelict boats. The Harbor Department has applied for another state grant to remove derelict boats.
  - Marshall Ochylski: No updates. The Los Osos Community Services District is operating normally. They won't hold an election in Nov since there are three open seats and three candidates.
  - Lexie Bell: She and Carolyn are participating in a west coast wide effort to assess eelgrass restoration practices and relative success/failure of different methods. This is a project of the Pacific Marine and Estuarine Fish Habitat Partnership (PMEP). We're excited that much of our eelgrass work will be included and that we'll learn a lot from others. There is also a statewide effort to monitor a subset of the estuarine Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) to create a model of how to monitor MPAs. Morro Bay is included in the pilot study to try out some different monitoring methods to demonstrate how effective MPAs are.
  - Ethan Bell: Stillwater is working with the NEP getting ready to do continued management of pikeminnow in Chorro Creek this fall. NEP is dedicating some substantial funds for that this year.
2. Public Comment – None presented.
  3. Agenda Revisions – None presented.
  4. **ACTION:** Consider Approval of May 20, 2020 EC meeting minutes.

**Vote:** Sam motioned to approve with the inclusion of edits provided by Matt, Kristin seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

5. **ACTION:** Recommend approval of Restoration Fund Spend Plan Update (see attached)

Staff is asking the EC to approve the amended Restoration Fund spend plan. This is a follow up task after the approval in May for restructuring the Community Projects program. The purpose of the restructuring was to put more emphasis on developing projects with partners and to better assess partner capacity to conduct projects. In May, the Bay Foundation and EC voted to increase the amount of funding for the Community Projects program. The maximum amount for a project was increased to \$10,000 and the total program budget for the year was increased to \$15,000. This means that for FY21 and FY22, we need an additional \$10,000 allocated in the five-year spend plan. The Bay Foundation approved this change in July. There are no foreseeable issues with the Restoration Fund lacking adequate funding for the Community Projects program. The funding has been invested fairly conservatively and is doing fine.

**Vote:** Marshall moved to approve, Bruce seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

6. **DISCUSSION:** Community Project Program update

Staff provided an update of the revamped Community Project program. Conversations are in progress with Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District on a project to enhance habitat for pollinators and monarchs and with Creek Lands Conservancy on a project to map plants and then propagate plants to improve diversity in Chorro Flats. Staff are working with both partners to develop the scope and budget for these efforts. Community Projects will come before the Bay Foundation and EC in November for a vote.

7. **DISCUSSION:** Program Evaluation (PE) update

We hosted a virtual visit so EPA could meet some of our partners and get their perspective on working with the Estuary Program. We hosted two meetings via Zoom, one focused on eelgrass research and the other focused on partners. Both went well, and we received very positive feedback from EPA. We received our draft PE letter, and we have passed the PE. This process won't be repeated for another five years. We can provide comments and edits on the draft PE letter, so we will focus on the Challenges section, where they give us things to work on over the next five years. It takes a while to get the signature, so we'll hopefully have it in November. We will update the EC twice a year on how we're addressing those challenges. The Challenges were related to using more measurable targets and results, hazard planning and preparedness, and sharing our progress implementing actions in the CCMP. Matt was struck by the accolades from EPA related to the leadership we provide at the national level, which says a lot about the work that we do. Suzanne added that we are really well respected nationally.

8. **DISCUSSION:** Program Highlights

- **Eelgrass update:** Staff provided updates on eelgrass restoration as well as an application submitted to the National Estuary Program Coastal Watersheds Grant Program.
- **Potential research partnership update:** Staff provided updates on a potential research effort to study herbicide impacts on bay eelgrass.
- **Education & Outreach updates:** Staff described an outreach project with the San Luis Obispo Marine Protected Area Collaborative involving the creation of coloring sheets that can be used with augmented reality. The project targets a younger audience that would normally be reached via school visits or in-person interactions. Another example of this type of project was a recently completed kids' activity booklet, which was able to be shared with MPAs throughout the state to be adapted for their areas. We feel that this augmented reality project also has a high potential for being replicated elsewhere.

Suzanne had a question for staff: How are we doing with COVID? The Monitoring team is spending more time in the field than usual since we don't have any volunteers right now. We've had a lot of social media focus on trash and picking up after your dog. We continue to work, collaborate via Zoom, etc. Overall we're doing OK.

9. Adjourn at 5:04. Motion by Sam, seconded by Matt. All in favor. Adjourn to next meeting of November 18, 2020 at 4:00 pm via video conferencing.

**Attachments:**

- Minutes from February 19, 2020 EC meeting
- FY2018 to FY2022 Restoration Fund Spend Plan