



MORRO BAY

NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Morro Bay National Estuary Program restores Chorro Creek fish and wildlife habitat

The Morro Bay National Estuary Program (Estuary Program), The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), and partners have completed a floodplain restoration project near the base of Hollister Peak in the Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve. This project, twenty years in the making, was made possible by two awards from CDFW's Fisheries Restoration Grant Program. The first award in 2015 funded design of the floodplain restoration project to address the erosion

and sedimentation problems. The design was completed, and in 2018 the Estuary Program received another FRGP grant to implement the project.



Reserve site where the restoration work was completed.

The project repaired a major source of erosion, and relocated 24,000 cubic yards of sediment to construct floodplain habitat, which greatly reduced the amount of excess sediment available to flow into Chorro Creek. It also removed part of a levee system, restored and expanded the natural floodplain, and included a partnership with the California Conservation Corps, whose members cultivated and planted more than 1,400 native trees, shrubs, and other plants on the Reserve.

Together, these improvements will:

- slow the flow of storm waters so that they can percolate down and add to the groundwater supply;
- allow native plants to thrive;
- provide 4.8 acres of critical habitat adjacent to Chorro Creek for California red-legged frog, steelhead trout, and other protected wildlife.



California Conservation Corps Members planted more than 1,400 native plants at the Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve.

Historically, the land that is now part of the Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve had been farmed. Both banks of the creek were leveed and water had been diverted from the creek for irrigation purposes. In 2001, the property was slated to be developed into a resort and golf course. Instead, the Trust for Public Lands purchased the property and resold it to the Wildlife Conservation Board, which had provided \$2.9 million toward the original sale. Additional funding was provided by the Morro Bay National Estuary Program, the Coastal Wetland Conservation Program (USFWS), the State Coastal Conservancy, the Caltrans TEA Grant, the Caltrans EEMP, The Nature Conservancy, and the City of Morro Bay. After the acquisition, the land was transferred to the CDFW. From the early 2000's, the Estuary Program helped to protect the property and support the transition of the land to public ownership.



The construction crew lined up Willow stakes along the edge of Chorro Creek before planting them.



Workers temporarily diverted water from Chorro Creek to protect wildlife during construction.

Since 1995, the Estuary Program has worked collaboratively throughout the watershed surrounding Morro Bay to improve water quality and protect habitat. A central issue impacting water quality in the Morro Bay is the addition of sediment to the bay due to upstream erosion. Land uses that degrade vegetation around creeks and destabilize soils contribute significantly to erosion and sedimentation. These processes are causing the bay to fill in at a rate that is faster than would naturally occur. The Estuary Program focuses on two main project types to address sedimentation – trapping sediment before it reaches the bay and improving upstream habitats to prevent erosion.

The Estuary Program has partnered closely with the CDFW over the last decade to provide assistance in addressing the erosion and sediment delivery. This ongoing partnership between CDFW and the Estuary Program has enabled this important project to be implemented, not only for the benefit of Chorro Creek habitat, but also for the benefit of Morro Bay in reducing sediment transport into that important ecosystem.

The project was completed in early 2020, with oversight from CDFW and the Estuary Program. Project funders include CDFW's Fisheries Restoration Grant Program, State Coastal Conservancy, and U.S. EPA.



Newly planted vegetation grows at the Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve restoration site.