

Morro Bay National Estuary Program
Community Project Applications for Fall 2020
Summary of Projects, Technical Review, and Staff Recommendations

We worked with three project partners to develop potential projects for our Community Projects program. After discussions with Estuary Program staff, each partner submitted an application in September 2020. We requested technical feedback for each project from a subset of Technical Advisory Committee members, and we requested Education & Outreach feedback from our E&O Technical Advisory Committee. Based on this input, staff developed recommendations on these three projects.

The maximum funding amount per project is \$10,000. Our available funding for FY2021 is \$15,000. Staff recommendations below would distribute the full funding available for the year in this round. These recommendations were based on our Community Project guidelines and reflect high quality projects with robust planning efforts.

Project 1: Supporting Pollinators and Monarch Habitat Awareness and Implementation in the Morro Bay Watershed

Applicant: Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District

Request: \$10,000

Matching Funding: \$4,000

Total Project Budget: \$14,000

Summary: While pollinator species such as birds, bees and butterflies are central to stable and biodiverse ecosystems, many of these species are in decline due to loss of habitat and impacts on their food and shelter due to climate change, pollution, etc. In early 2020, the CSLRCD began developing a Pollinator and Monarch program in response to landowner requests for technical assistance and resources. This included the creation of plans including planting designs, preferred plant types, and guidance on management practices.

The proposed project has two main components:

- Implementation: The project would implement these habitat enhancement plans. Funding would purchase restoration materials (plants, soil, fencing, irrigation, etc.) and RCD staff time for implementation and technical assistance for site management. A minimum of 0.5 acres will be treated.
- Education: The approach depends on whether the project site is on public or private property. If public lands, the RCD will create an educational sign to describe pollinators and their habitats. They will host a minimum of two field tours. If private property, the RCD will host a minimum of two interactive field tours. Beyond this, the RCD will present at a minimum of two local events and write one article highlighting the work.

Relevant CCMP Action Plans: ECR-12 (Upland Habitat), ECR-13 (Population Dynamics), ECR-14 (Support Recovery Plans), ECR-16 (Invasive Species Action), EO-1 (Public Education and Outreach).

Technical Reviewer Input: We solicited input from three local restoration experts who are familiar with the area and our program. One reviewer strongly supported the project and found the budget reasonable, the tasks achievable, and the project impactful for biodiversity in the watershed. One

reviewer felt that more evidence was needed that monarchs utilize the area, but staff felt that the applicant has already demonstrated this. The third reviewer wanted to see the project revised to focus on a shift in tree canopy. Raptors and monarchs use eucalyptus and other non-natives just because they're the tallest trees in the area. He was interested in an effort to remove taller trees and replace with oaks, willows, sycamores, etc. While we see the value in this approach, it seems well beyond the scope of a Community Project.

E&O Review: The group strongly supported this project and felt that of the three applications, this project had the best-developed E&O component, seemed to be the most impactful, and aligned best with Estuary Program goals.

Partner Capacity Review: CSLRCD staff submitted a Capacity Review worksheet that demonstrates their extensive experience managing funding, budgets, and reporting. Based on this information, they have the capacity to complete the proposed project.

Potential COVID-19 Impacts: CSLRCD stated in their application that the current public health crisis might limit their ability to complete the project within the timeframe or as described, but they would work closely with us on any impacts.

Staff Recommendation: Staff supports funding this project. We feel that the scope is reasonable and achievable given the budget and the one-year project timeline. We think it is impactful from both the education and restoration perspectives. The project also has the potential to be scalable and able to serve as a pilot for future funding proposals. We recommend funding of \$9,500. This reduction could be covered nearly in full by eliminating the subscriptions/ads for the outreach campaign and instead utilizing partner outreach tools already in place, including blogs, social media, etc.

Project 2: Chorro Flats Botanical Inventory

Applicant: Central Coast Salmon Enhancement dba Creek Lands Conservation

Request: \$5,266

Matching Funding: \$4,734

Total Project Budget: \$10,000

Summary: Creek Lands Conservation (CLC) proposes conducting a botanical inventory using volunteers, CLC staff, and AmeriCorps Watershed Stewards Program members at Chorro Flats. This is the first component in a multi-phase project to address plant biodiversity in the watershed. The proposed project has five tasks:

- Meetings/Management
- Volunteer Coordination
- Site Assessment/Logistics
- Bioblitz
- Reporting and recommendations

Relevant CCMP Action Plans: ECR-2 (Riparian Corridors), ECR-16 (Invasive Species Action)

Technical Reviewer Input: None of the reviewers supported funding for this project. They felt like the biodiversity in the area was already fairly well known and beyond that there are a good number of local

individuals who are already very familiar with plants in that area. They didn't think the end result product would be very useful.

E&O Reviewer Input: The E&O Working Group did not see this as a very strong project. Only six citizen scientists would be involved, so the reach would be extremely limited. They did not recommend funding this project.

Partner Capacity Review: Information provided by CLC indicates that they would be able to manage the necessary components of a successful project, including invoicing, budgeting, reporting, etc. It seems like they would be able to complete the effort in the one-year timeframe.

Potential COVID-19 Impacts: CLC indicated in their application that the data collection could be conducted as proposed with AmeriCorps Watershed Stewards program members and trained volunteers working independently and socially distanced during outdoor data collection. All other project aspects would be conducted by staff and could be accomplished.

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends that we do not fund this effort. We agree with reviewers that the end product would not be that useful for us, and the education reach seems fairly limited.

Project 3: Developing a Long-Term Monitoring Program for Microplastics in the Morro Bay Estuary

Applicant: Dr. Nikki Adams, Cal Poly Biology Department

Request: \$6,551

Matching Funding: \$10,449

Total Project Budget: \$17,000

Summary: While plastic pollution in the ocean is fairly well-studied, microplastics (fragments or fibers smaller than 5mm) are now receiving attention due to their impacts of wildlife and people. Dr. Adams proposes a year-long survey to assess the presence and concentration of microplastics in the estuary. She and her students would sample three locations. The goal is to establish a long-term monitoring program for microplastics. On the education and outreach side, the project involves collaborating with us on involving local schools in the monitoring, involving at least four Cal Poly students directly in the research, and creating outreach activities that can be conducted at public events. Dr. Adams teaches a course called Communicating Ocean Sciences for Informal Audiences, and she will have at least one student team focus on microplastics in the ocean, thus creating curriculum that could be used by our organization and partners.

Relevant CCMP Action Plans: MON-6 (Support Research Activities), ECR-11 (Conserve Ecosystem Functions), EO-1 (Public Education and Outreach)

Technical Reviewer Input: The project was reviewed by two individuals with experience in microplastics monitoring, one from the San Francisco Estuary Institute and one from the State Water Board. They found the proposal to be sound and very impactful from the educational standpoint. The sampling and analysis methods are sound and up-to-date. They noted that one of the methods they will be using doesn't allow for polymer identification, and thus it is unlikely that they could publish in a peer-reviewed journal. However, they considered the educational portion to be significant and recommended funding. We also received feedback from our restoration reviewers who all supported the effort.

E&O Reviewer Input: The E&O Working Group thought the project had good overall value and depth in the E&O component.

Partner Capacity Review: Based on information provided by Dr. Adams, she has the experience with grant management, budget management, invoicing, and reporting to successfully complete the project.

Potential COVID-19 Impacts: Dr. Adams feels that the fieldwork and analysis would not be impacted by COVID. Cal Poly has stringent protocols in place regarding student research. The outreach aspects of the project could be affected if face-to-face outreach cannot take place. Dr. Adams proposes pivoting to online content with the help of the Estuary Program to provide microplastics outreach.

Staff Recommendation: Staff recommends funding this at the \$5,500 level. Dr. Adams states that a successful project can take place with reduced funding, with potential cuts made by borrowing equipment rather than purchasing it. Additional Estuary Program 320 funding could purchase the materials needed for outreach efforts, as we are likely to continue those after the project ends.