



For Immediate Release

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CONGRESS MOVES TO INVEST IN THE NATION'S ESTUARIES

Reauthorizes the National Estuary Program to recover and grow coastal economic economies and ensure resilient coastal communities

(MORRO BAY, CA, 01/29/2021) - Congress reaffirmed its support and strong commitment to the National Estuary Program a time tested, non-regulatory program that enables communities to restore and protect the bays and estuaries they call home. Morro Bay National Estuary Program is one of 28 "estuaries of national significance" along every coast that will benefit directly from legislation approved by Congress. It was strongly supported by Senator Dianne Feinstein, Senator Kamala Harris, and Representative Salud Carbajal.

The Protect and Restore America's Estuaries Act, with strong bipartisan support and unanimous approval from the Senate, was signed into law on January 13, 2021. The Act reaffirms support for the work of the National Estuary Program, and nearly doubles the annual possible funding allowance to \$50 million. Under the new law, each NEP could receive as much as \$1 million each year (actual funding dependent on annual budgets passed by Congress). Morro Bay National Estuary Program works with our communities at the local level to protect the coastal resources essential for tourism, commerce, storm protection, clean water, and marine-based food supply such as fisheries and aquaculture. Increasing threats from pollution, harmful algal blooms, accelerating land loss, and risks to biodiversity threaten the vitality of estuaries across the country, and are a growing concern.

"These actions demonstrate a clear recognition by Congress of the economic and environmental value of our nation's estuaries and coasts," said Lexie Bell, Chair of the national nonprofit Association of National Estuary Programs, established in 1995 to bring the National Estuary Programs together for collaboration and shared learning.

Rep. Tom Malinowski, D-N.J., a member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, and the original sponsor of the bill introduced in July 2019 said, "Estuaries nurture a vast array of marine life, filter pollutants from rivers before they reach the sea, and are the natural infrastructure that protects human communities from floods and storms. As extreme weather events increasingly threaten these nurseries of the sea, I'm very proud this important legislation was signed into law, so these critical waterways will continue to be protected." "In addition to funding research and providing grants, the National Estuary Program ensures that the management plans governing nationally significant estuaries consider the effects of increasing and recurring extreme weather events and develop and implement appropriate adaptation strategies," said Lexie Bell, Executive Director of the Morro Bay National Estuary Program and Chair of the Association of National Estuary Programs' Board of Directors. "We are greatly appreciative of the strong support from our Senators and Representatives for the important work being done in our estuaries through our program and in collaboration with so many partners across sectors," said Lexie Bell.

Last year, Morro Bay National Estuary Program, successfully worked to complete a major floodplain restoration project along Chorro Creek near Hollister Peak with partners including California Department of Fish and Wildlife's Fisheries Restoration Grants Program, California State Coastal Conservancy, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the California Conservation Corps. In 2020, the Morro Bay National Estuary Program also continued our work to monitor water quality in the bay and local creeks, research

the causes of eelgrass decline, restore eelgrass to the Morro Bay estuary, and share information about protecting and conserving the bay with locals and visitors. More information about the Morro Bay National Estuary Program is available at MBNEP.org.

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