



Executive Committee Quarterly Meeting
Via Video Conferencing

February 17, 2021
4:00 pm

Minutes

Attendees: Matt Keeling, *Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board*; Kristin Hardy, *Cal Poly*; Marshall Ochylski, *LOCSD*; Jason Curtis, *Bay Foundation*; John Flaherty, *Central Coast Outdoors*; Ethan Bell, *Stillwater Sciences*; Tim Duff, *California Coastal Conservancy*; Becca Kelly, *Morro Bay Harbor Department*; Dawn Addis, *City of Morro Bay*; Chris Womack, *LOCSD*; Suzanne Marr, *USEPA*; Ann Kitajima, *MBNEP Staff*; Lexie Bell, *MBNEP Staff*.

1. Introductions and Updates

- Jason Curtis: Vice President for the Bay Foundation of Morro Bay, and Vice President of Instruction at Cuesta College. Jason will be serving as the Bay Foundation representative in the future, as approved by the Board.
- Dawn Addis: Dawn is our new Executive Committee (EC) representative from the Morro Bay City Council. She specifically asked for this assignment and is excited to be here. Laurel Barton will serve as the alternate. Dawn is with San Luis Coastal Unified School District, working with staff at all school sites on program development.
- Becca Kelly: Harbor Patrol supervisor with City of Morro Bay. No particular updates for the group.
- Marshall Ochylski: Was just re-elected to the Los Osos Community Services District (LOCSD) board. He has already served 12 years and will serve four more. In his day job, he is a real estate attorney. Chris Womack, the new president of the LOCSD, will serve as the alternate for the EC.
- Chris Womack: President of the LOCSD. Excited to join the meeting and learn more about the group.
- Matt Keeling: Executive Officer of Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (CCRWQCB). They released a revised agricultural order on January 26 for public comment, which ends next week on Feb 25. They hope to bring a proposed order to the Water Board for the April 14 and 15 meeting. In its current form, the order includes forward-thinking requirements associated with measuring and reporting on the amount of nitrogen fertilizer applied and removed to track nitrate loading to groundwater basins and surface waters over time. The order sets loading and application limits with a 30-year time horizon and an ultimate goal of meeting drinking water standards.
- John Flaherty: Central Coast Outdoors, owner/operator and the tourism/recreation interests representative on the EC. Just got off the water and can report that eelgrass is doing really well. Because of COVID, the Winter Birdfest was canceled last month, which was a loss for the area. But they are seeing a fair amount of visitors and kayaking, regardless of COVID. The kayak docks at State Park Marina were recently reconstructed, and they are happy with the new improved facilities.
- Kristin Hardy: Representing the Science and Research interests and is a professor at Cal Poly's Biology Department. The Center for Coastal Marine Sciences in Biology Department recently received a sizable donation, which should be beneficial for the program. The intention is to use it to support under-represented students. The university is still virtual and trying to plan for in-person classes in the fall. At the end of her current term, Kristin will resign from the EC, and Crowe White, who is currently serving as an alternate, will become the representative for Science and Research interests seat.
- Suzanne Marr: Suzanne is our Program Manager at EPA's Regional Headquarters. There is a good deal of transition happening at EPA and a lot of waiting to see what changes will come about with the Biden Administration. EPA does have some brownfields money, not just for estuaries but for the region, where EPA can help assess a formerly industrial area for redevelopment. If we know of any locations in the watershed or elsewhere, let her know.

- Tim Duff: Tim is with the State Coastal Conservancy (SCC). The Los Osos Creek wetland restoration project that the SCC is funding with the Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District (CSLRCD) is going to the SCC board next month. Pending a Wildlife Conservation Board funding award, they should have all the funds needed to construct the project this summer/fall. They are working with the City of Morro Bay on completing the second phase of the Toro Creek acquisition (Dog Beach and adjacent lot). The City is pushing hard to get this done by end of March. SCC just sent out a solicitation for letters of interest in working with SCC to submit national coastal wetlands conservation grants. They have successfully partnered with CSLRCD and the Estuary Program on that grant in the past, so he's happy to talk about potential projects. Sam Schuchat, the current Executive Officer, is retiring in July. Tim will keep us posted and will continue to participate as the new Executive Officer comes on board this summer.
 - Lexie Bell: Lexie serves as the Executive Director for the Estuary Program. EC alternates are welcome to call in if they want, but not required.
 - Ann Kitajima: Ann serves as the Assistant Director for the Estuary Program.
 - Ethan Bell: Ethan works with Stillwater Sciences. He is currently working with our Restoration Projects Manager Carolyn Geraghty on a proposal to manage invasive pikeminnow in Chorro Creek.
2. Public Comment – None presented.
 3. Agenda Revisions – None presented.
 4. **ACTION:** Consider Approval of November 18, 2020 EC meeting minutes.

Vote: Marshall motioned to approve, John seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

5. **ACTION:** Consider approval of Restoration Fund disbursement for Lazy LS Conservation Easement (see attached)

This easement project has been underway for about three years. The owner, Larry Sage, reached out to us, and we connected him with The Land Conservancy of SLO County (LCSLO). His property is 380 acres in the Chorro Valley with some development potential. The landowner wants to retire all the development rights for the property, which makes the easement more expensive. The property has ag going on now with a small scale cattle operation. It's a great parcel to protect due to nearby easements on Hyatt-Siepel Ranch and Maino Ranch. The property has great riparian tributary zones that flow into San Luisito and Chorro Creeks. Larry has been very proactive in learning about practices that are more sustainable and wildlife friendly. He's done a lot of work to maintain riparian areas, including adding off-creek water to minimize cattle impact on creeks. He also keeps the number of cattle low.

Lexie presented a virtual tour of the property. It has extensive oak habitat, and Larry has done work to fence oaks to keep cattle from grazing on them. There is minimal infrastructure on the property, only a ranch headquarters with a trailer and barn type building with water access. There is infrastructure such as troughs, tanks, and solar panels for pumps.

The easement will not make use of Army Compatible Use Buffer (ACUB) Program funding, which is a Department of Defense program to minimize development around military bases like Camp SLO. Instead, this easement would be funded through the state's Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation grant program and will pay for 75% of cost of the easement. The LCSLO are looking to cover the difference with our funding and with landowner contribution. Staff recommend that we spend \$148,500 from our Restoration Fund, which is the amount set aside in the five-year spending plan that ends this year. Since these deals take a while to establish, it's unlikely we'll have another easement ready to go before Fiscal Year (FY) 2022. Staff feels that this would be a good use of funds to support and complete this easement this year with the remaining funds, and then with the start of FY2022, we will start a new spending plan with new funding available for the next five years. We will be able to use The LCSLO funding as match for our federal EPA grant since it is state funding.

Matt commented that it's great that this parcel is adjacent to two existing easements, so it really expands the protected area. Becka wanted to know who the landowner is between this new easement and our existing Maino Ranch easement. We know the landowner but since it's a smaller parcel, it's difficult to find funding for an easement.

In general, an easement means the landowner is selling some of their property rights. Sometimes landowners save the right to build on a portion of the parcel. Larry wants to sell all development rights, which is somewhat unusual. Suzanne thought it would be great to produce a summary of when these easements were established, acreages protected, etc. as a nice illustration of protected lands. The growing acreage of protected lands is a tribute to our partnership with The LCSLO.

Tim comments that supports the proposal. The SCC is working with The LCSLO on north county acquisitions and have been very impressed with their ability to secure significant state match funding. The LCSLO runs a robust easement monitoring program and is an ideal partner to manage the property.

Vote: Kelly moves to approve the Restoration Fund spending on the Lazy LS Ranch easement. Matt seconds. All in favor. None opposed.

6. **DISCUSSION:** FY2022 Workplan Ideas (see attached)

Our federal fiscal year starts October 1. We are developing the Workplan for FY2022. For today's discussion, we want to stay at a higher level and talk about categories of Workplan tasks that we're considering including and/or expanding with the additional funding. Once we receive EC feedback, staff will edit the Workplan and develop the budget. In May, we will present the Workplan with all of the detail and budget for EC approval, and we will submit it to EPA by June 1. Our FY2021 grant was for \$662,500. Our FY2022 funding is expected to increase to \$700,000. Our funding gets approved by Congress a year before we get it. We want to use the funding in ways that are the most strategic for the program. We'd like to prioritize projects that are difficult to fund from other sources.

We created a list of all FY2021 Workplan tasks with a few additional ideas for FY2022. When the Bay Foundation met, there was an interest in supporting the fish passage barrier project and additional restoration capacity/staffing. A little bit more funding for a part-time technician to help with restoration fieldwork would free up Carolyn Geraghty, our Restoration Projects Manager, for more project development and grant writing. Lexie thought the highest priorities for Education & Outreach and Restoration are to fund staffing. The fish passage barrier removal is of interest as there are funding opportunities for the work right now, but the project needs small scale initial funding for planning to make us more competitive for bigger grants.

Native oyster restoration has come up as an interest for the area, but no project proposal has been developed. Conservation is getting started but there is no project ready for funding that we're aware of. There is interest and a desire for the work. Kristin is trying to determine if this is an area to focus her research. Ethan agrees that it's a topic worth exploring.

For Monitoring and Research, State of the Bay data analysis supports the 2023 environmental report card. The Ocean Acidification (OA) monitoring work has already been funded in part by an EPA Coastal Watersheds Grant that we just won.

Suzanne thinks these ideas sound good. Staffing is important and makes sense. Marshall agrees with our proposed priorities. Kristin agrees and is happy to see OA monitoring on the list. Dawn loves the idea of education and being able to add capacity. Matt inquired about local partners on the issue of sea-level rise (SLR). We worked with city of Morro Bay when they updated their local coastal plan. We haven't yet developed any local academic partnerships. We have an ongoing relationship with the U.S. Geological

Survey (USGS) on SLR. The Water Board is looking at opportunities to address adaptation strategies. Ethan is excited about the potential removal of the San Luisito Creek fish passage barriers.

Staff will review the budget and potential new tasks. We will come back in May with a fully fleshed out Workplan and budget.

7. DISCUSSION: Community Project update

Staff reported on the status of the two Community Projects approved by the EC in the November 2020 meeting, which were a microplastics monitoring effort and a monarch and pollinator restoration effort. The restoration effort is a CSLRCD project, and they are in communication with the local Audubon chapter on doing the work at Sweet Springs. For the microplastics project, there have been some delays in starting the research due to COVID and challenges with permitting, but training, purchasing equipment, student recruitment, and other activities are underway to get the work started.

8. DISCUSSION: Program Evaluation (PE) Letter update (see attached)

Staff has been busy addressing the challenges identified by EPA in their Program Evaluation process, which was completed last September. Staff reports twice a year on progress made toward addressing these challenges. Staff outlined activities to track changes in conditions and outcomes, to share Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) status, to expand our outreach efforts to include visitors and non-English speaking members of the public, and to address water reuse and hazard mitigation challenges.

Staff will come to the EC with an update on our PE progress every six months.

9. DISCUSSION: Program Highlights

- **National Updates:** Reauthorization for the NEPs went through at the end of the last Congress. We were able to get it passed and signed it into law on January 13, the last day before it would be pocket vetoed. For more details, see our press release. <https://www.mbnep.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/CONGRESS-MOVES-TO-INVEST-IN-THE-NATIONS-ESTUARIES.pdf>
 - **Coastal Watersheds Grant opportunity:** It was an extremely competitive selection process, and we were pleased to be one of eight funded projects. Representative Carbajal made a congratulatory message for us during the kick-off meeting.
 - **Blog updates:** Last week's blog was focused on monitoring of runoff from the First Storm of the season last fall, which was timely given the big storms in late January. Blog posts are especially valuable for us because they're easy to share when questions from the public come up on various topics.
 - **Hiring:** We are hiring a new Monitoring Projects Manager since Karissa Willits is ready to move on to greener and wetter places. She provided a lot of lead time before her departure, so we're hoping to hire someone before bioassessment monitoring begins in April. The job posting is available at <https://www.mbnep.org/job%20openings/> Please share if you know of anyone who might be interested.
- 10. Adjourn at 5:35. Motion by Kristen, seconded by Becka. All in favor. Adjourn to next meeting of May 19, 2021 at 4:00 pm via video conferencing.**

Attachments:

- Minutes from November 18, 2020 EC meeting
- Lazy LS Project Description
- PE Letter status
- FY2021 Workplan