

**Morro Bay National Estuary Program
Program Evaluation Status
For 2025**

Prepared for the Executive Committee August 2021 Meeting

This memo provides the status of the required actions outlined in the Program Evaluation (PE) letter from the 2020 review by EPA.

Reporting on Changes in Conditions and Outcomes

Status: Ongoing

Feedback from PE process: EPA would like to see calculations or estimates of pollutant reduction due to CCMP actions, whenever feasible. Would like to see these results shared in the annual work plan and the MBNEP website.

Activities to address comment:

- Throughout the spring and summer, the Estuary Program and Cal Poly conducted restoration and research under an NEP Coastal Watersheds Grant. Data collection for a microclimate study measured water quality parameters within an eelgrass bed and in a nearby area without eelgrass for comparison. Differences in these measurements would quantify the improvements in water quality from eelgrass. Results are expected later this year.
- Whenever possible, MBNEP incorporates pre- and post-project monitoring designed to provide data of pollutant reduction or restoration success. This is constrained by project type and monitoring feasibility (both in terms of logistics and cost).
- Staff is developing the idea of sharing this type of information along with CCMP implementation status (see below).

CCMP Implementation

Status: Ongoing

Feedback from PE process: EPA liked the internal tracking system we developed to monitor CCMP implementation progress. They would like to see a public-facing version of the information, perhaps in the Annual Report or on the website.

Activities to address comment:

- Staff are beginning conversations to establish a webpage tracking CCMP implementation progress in a very public-friendly manner. It will likely follow a dashboard type format and show the number of action plans underway within priority areas such as Land Conservation, Monitoring & Research, etc. This effort will get underway once edits to the CCMP update are complete at the end of the fiscal year.

Program Implementation and Reporting – Outreach and Public Involvement

Status: Ongoing

Feedback from PE process: EPA would like to see more outreach efforts specifically targeting visitors to Morro Bay. EPA would also like to see outreach materials geared toward a diversity of visitors.

Activities to address comment:

- Estuary Program staff member Rachel Pass is serving as co-chair for the SLO Marine Protected Area (MPA) Collaborative, a group of more than 28 nonprofits, agencies, colleges, tribal representatives, and community interest groups within the county who work together on monitoring, education, and enforcement issues within local MPAs. The group recently collaborated with the Monterey Marine Protected Area to complete a \$100,000-grant project that funded the creation of additional virtual reality content, revision of existing content, printing, and cross-state distribution of a bilingual MPA-focused coloring book and both English and Spanish versions of a popular MPA Explorers kids' activity booklet. Between these three publications, this project highlights coastal and marine ecosystems, wildlife, nonpoint source pollution causes and solutions, water quality, stewardship actions, and more within California's MPAs. All three booklets are available online at <https://www.mpacollaborative.org/kids/> They are also being distributed to all 14 MPA Collaborative groups in California. These groups will provide these educational resources to children and their families in areas from which most Morro Bay visitors hail, including the Bay Area, Fresno, and Bakersfield.
- Additional SLO MPA Collaborative efforts include education and outreach opportunities for the public to learn about MPA wildlife, habitats, and regulations. Much of this work has been adapted to online programs including the California State Parks PORTS program and live-screen casts, which the Estuary Program has contributed to.
- Staff are coordinating with the County Stormwater Program to partner on efforts to spread clean water messaging through social media campaigns. Staff established a contract with the County's communications firm, and the effort is about to be kicked-off. The Estuary Program-funded campaign will focus on residents and visitors picking up pest waste to help keep bacteria out of the bay. These campaigns reach both locals and visitors and promote reducing nonpoint source pollution.
- The Estuary Program is currently working to translate our most popular educational handouts into Spanish to better serve our visitors. We will be printing these brochures to make them available in our Nature Center and posting them on our website online.
- The Estuary Program is also seeking long-term formal education partners who work with school children in the Central Valley, especially Kern County, who we know are recurring long-term visitors to Morro Bay.

Water Reuse and Hazard Mitigation

Status: Ongoing

Feedback from PE process: EPA encourages projects such as the Pennington Creek rainwater catchment project to help address future water supply challenges. EPA recommends further consideration of the stressors identified in the Climate Vulnerability Assessment (CVA) to determine potential hazard mitigation projects. EPA would like, where possible, for the Estuary Program to establish pre-disaster partnerships and post-disaster approaches to conduct monitoring and to identify CCMP Actions that would assist in building resilience to hazards and the changing climate.

Activities to address comment:

- The Estuary Program completed an update of the CVA, and the updated document was shared with partners and is available on our website.
- The Estuary Program is working to complete phase 3 of the Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve project, an effort to successfully reconnect the creek to its floodplain. The last plantings, plant monitoring, and channel monitoring are underway.
- Staff have been continuing work on the Conservation Planning Initiative (CPI), a document to outline challenges to habitat and establish targets to measure habitat health. Many of these metrics, such as surface water flow, water quality parameters, changes in wetland areas, etc. are impacted by the challenges outlined in the CVA. The plan also outlines projects and efforts to mitigate for these potential hazards. Work is underway with contractors on analysis to establish restoration targets for freshwater flows and for eelgrass acreage.
- COVID has led to the development of procedures and protocols for safely operating the office and for staff and volunteers to safely conduct fieldwork. These activities address post-disaster approaches to allow the continuation of valuable monitoring efforts. As public health guidance is continually changing, Estuary Program policies have been updated to reflect the latest recommendations and requirements.