



Executive Committee Quarterly Meeting
Via Video Conferencing

November 17, 2021
4:00 pm

Minutes

Attendees: Matt Keeling, *Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board*; Crow White, *Cal Poly*; John Flaherty, *Central Coast Outdoors*; Ethan Bell, *Stillwater Sciences*; Trudy O'Brien, *Commercial fishing interest*; Bruce Gibson, *SLO County*; Laurel Barton, *City of Morro Bay*; Suzanne Marr, *USEPA*; Ann Kitajima, *MBNEP Staff*; Lexie Bell, *MBNEP Staff*.

1. Introductions and Updates

- Ethan Bell: Stillwater Sciences has a crew working with the Estuary Program on pikeminnow suppression in Chorro Creek. The effort has been going well so far, and they have been able to cover a lot of ground using funding the Estuary Program acquired. They are seeing a lot of steelhead and removing a lot of pikeminnow. They will be working through the rest of this week.
- Matt Keeling: The Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary proposal looks like it's moving forward. The next Water Board meeting should be in December, although not sure if there will be a quorum. Jeff Young just retired after about 20 years on the Board. There may be another member in place by the December meeting. The two main items on the agenda: 1) A contaminated sand waste impoundment landfill permit at the Guadalupe landfill which would allow for encapsulating waste on site rather than having to transport it, and 2) Triennial review update for Basin Plan amendments. Staff is planning a racial equity primer discussion with the Board.
- Bruce Gibson: There is the potential for the Morro Bay estuary and watershed to be divided among three different supervisory districts based on the potential re-districting plan.
- Suzanne Marr: The infrastructure money just passed. We're still unsure how much will be coming to the NEPs but we should hear more soon from EPA Administration. EPA is working hard on a climate adaptation plan, nationally and regionally.
- Trudy: Nothing to report. Eelgrass is growing extremely well in Morro Bay.
- Crow White: It will be interesting to see how the Chumash National Marine Sanctuary plays out. Recommend checking out the map of the proposed area, which goes up the coast to the edge of the estuary. There's a carve out for the wind energy area. Cal Poly recently helped run a science conference called the Western Society of Naturalists. There was a presentation by a Stanford University grad student on monitoring eelgrass in the estuary using drones and machine learning algorithms. Andrew Fricker is the lead on that.
- Laurel Barton: Filling in for Dawn Addis and excited to be here. Been interested in learning more about this organization.
- Ann: No updates beyond today's agenda.
- Lexie: The language in the infrastructure bill includes funding for each National Estuary Program (NEP) for projects that are infrastructure related and improve environmental outcomes. We'll be having partner discussions in the next year or so to plan how to spend the funding. On the National Marine Sanctuary discussion, the NEP is not taking a position one way or the other about the sanctuary since have different stakeholder groups with different opinions on the topic and because technically it's outside of our study area. If people are curious, there are already a number of protections within the estuary including Marine Protected Areas.
- John Flaherty: Things still busy on the bay tourism-wise.

2. Public Comment – None.

3. Agenda Revisions – Lexie requested to add a personnel update at the end of the Program Highlights.
4. **ACTION:** Consider Approval of August 18, 2021 Executive Committee (EC) meeting minutes.

Vote: Matt motioned to approve, Crow seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

5. **ACTION:** Executive Committee Bylaw Update

As we discussed at the August meeting, we are interested amending the Agricultural Interest seat to broaden the category which could help fill that seat. Lexie revised the bylaws to change the description of this seat to Watershed Land Management and included note that the seat would prioritize those with connections to local agriculture when feasible. The Bay Foundation approved the change at their November meeting. If the EC approves, Lexie will send out a clean version after the meeting.

On recruiting for that seat, Lexie reached out to ALAB members for SLO County. Lexie is working on an introduction to a Los Osos agricultural landowner through Jean-Pierre Wolff. If that idea does not work out, then we will move on to other possibilities.

Matt had a question on the bylaws. The first bullet on the first page mentions funding approval requires Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) approval. Lexie clarified that this refers to having the RWQCB seat on the EC. Originally it referred to the original PG&E settlement funds that the Bay Foundation was managing. We have completed the legal obligation but still have remaining funds based on investment income. The RWQCB confirmed that we can keep working with those funds, and we don't have an obligation to maintain that check in with the RWQCB. Regardless, the way we've done it in the past is that the person sitting in the Water Board seat on the EC is the approver. Lexie will amend the bylaws to clarify and submit the changes in writing seven days in advance of the next meeting.

Vote: Bruce motioned to approve. Matt seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

6. **ACTION:** Recommendations on Community Project Applications

Staff described the two Community Project applications. Matt expressed an interest in the Harbor Department tracking how many pads were used to absorb oil versus those that were not. This can be recorded in the tracking spreadsheet that the city will establish. Suzanne commented that the Watershed Model project would be a great way to get Kern County involved and a great opportunity for an environmental justice piece for those from elsewhere in the state. Ethan commented that it was really interesting to see the diversity in the two proposals. One was extremely local and involved an existing partnership conducting a direct intervention on the bay, while the other was a new partner with a broader scope looking to the future by educating youth on non-point source pollution. Crow agreed that both are great projects.

Vote: Crow motioned to approve both projects as proposed. Matt seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

7. **DISCUSSION:** Presentation of the Semi-annual Report

A semi-annual is created twice a year to describe the activities of the program and summarize the budget. At the end of the five-year grant that started in Fiscal Year 2017, 94% of the EPA funding has been spent, and 258% of our match requirement for the cumulative grant has been met. We received an extension from EPA giving us additional time to spend down the remaining \$20 funding.

8. **DISCUSSION:** Organizational Review

Lexie presented a brief update for members to refresh everyone on the purpose of the EC, how it fits into the NEP model, and what seats are represented on the committee. Our Management Conference consists of the Bay Foundation and the Executive Committee. Lexie emphasized the culture of consensus between these two entities.

9. DISCUSSION: 2020 Baywide Eelgrass Map

In November and December of 2020, Cal Poly flew their drone to capture high resolution baywide imagery. The eelgrass was then identified manually, and a baywide eelgrass map was developed. The process identified 146 acres of eelgrass. We estimate that this value has approximately a 10% error associated with it.

10. DISCUSSION: Program Highlights

- **Community Project Updates:** Staff provided updates on the three ongoing Community Projects.
 - **Bioassessment Updates:** Staff described the new partnership to conduct bioassessment in neighboring SLO watershed. Additionally, there is a recently completed video summarizing the monitoring process and the data: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vTXb4yolmg>
 - **Staffing Updates:** Nick Soares recently joined us as a Monitoring Coordinator.
 - **Personnel Update:** Lexie will be leaving the Estuary Program at the end of this year to pursue an opportunity at Cuesta College.
 - **Additional Comment:** Matt added that next year is the 50th anniversary of the Clean Water Act and that it might be a good outreach opportunity for our program and the other NEPs.
- 11.** Adjourn at 5:20 p.m. to the next meeting of February 16, 2022 at 4:00 p.m., to be held remotely via Zoom.