

Morro Bay National Estuary Program
Program Evaluation Status for 2025
Prepared for the February 2022 Executive Committee 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:

- Whenever possible, the Estuary Program 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). The Estuary Program is partnered with Trout Unlimited (TU) to collect flow data on Pennington Creek in a location where a TU project was implemented to address a water diversion.
- The recently completed Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve (CCER) floodplain restoration project was designed to reconnect the creek to its floodplain to trap sediment and improve habitat. The Estuary Program has conducted monitoring on the site during bigger winter storms. A follow-up drone survey as well as cross-sectional and long profiles will help assess sediment trapped by the project.
- 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 the 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 just beginning the effort 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 ongoing action plans within priority areas such as Land Conservation, Monitoring & Research, etc. This effort will get underway once edits to the CCMP update are complete. EPA is now asking for additional edits to the CCMP related to climate change, which might delay this webpage development effort.

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 continues to participate in the SLO Marine Protected Area Collaborative (SLOMPAC), 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 Estuary Program has been able to apply for, receive, and manage grant funding to allow for education and outreach efforts that all SLOMPAC members can use. This has allowed for the development, printing, and distribution of E&O materials for use throughout the SLOMPAC area and beyond. The Estuary Program plans to continue participating in the effort to develop outreach efforts and seek funding.
- The Estuary Program is partnering with San Luis Obispo County Stormwater Program to spread clean water messaging through social media campaigns. Staff established a contract with the County's communications firm. Staff worked with the firm to develop the messaging, social media schedule, analytics reporting, and other components of the campaign. This allows for outreach as well as some metrics to understand the reach of the effort. The Estuary Program-funded campaign focused 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 to protect activities such as shellfish farming and recreating safely on the bay. Staff met with the Central Coast Clean Management Committee in January to discuss the campaign for the upcoming year.
- The Estuary Program is currently working to translate our most popular educational handouts into Spanish to better serve our visitors. The 101 brochure and bird guide were translated into Spanish and are currently being printed for distribution in our Nature Center and through our website. Other educational content currently under development will be bilingual in English and Spanish.
- 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. Camp KEEP (Kern Environmental Education Program) is now operating an outdoor school within the watershed, serving students from both Kern County and SLO County. The Estuary Program recently partnered with Camp KEEP on a project to enhance watershed education.

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 conducts monitoring and maintenance on the Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve restoration project, an effort to successfully reconnect the creek to its floodplain. Additional monitoring and analysis was conducted to look at how the site fared with last winter's large storm. This information helps demonstrate the efficacy of the site in providing flooding protection and reducing sediment loading to the bay.
- The Conservation Planning Initiative (CPI), a document to outline challenges to habitat and establish targets to measure habitat health, is now complete. Two analyses were conducted to inform the development of metrics for surface water flows and eelgrass. Many of these metrics in the CPI, 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.
- The ever-changing COVID situation 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.