



**Executive Committee Quarterly Meeting
Via Video Conference Call**

**May 18, 2022
4:00 pm**

Staff Report

1. **INFORMATIONAL:** The proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary process is underway. Some of the proposed plans include the Morro Bay estuary within the sanctuary area. To share information on the process with our Management Committee, Paul Michel, the West Coast Region Policy Coordinator, will present an overview with a brief discussion and questions to follow.
2. Introductions and Updates
3. Public Comment
4. Agenda Revisions
5. **ACTION:** Consider Approval of February 16, 2022 Executive Committee (EC) minutes (see attached)
6. **ACTION:** Recommend Approval of the Fiscal Year 2023 Workplan (see attached)

The principal funding source for the Estuary Program is the annual EPA grant. For Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23), current budget projections indicate funding of \$750,000. This is a 7% increase over FY22. We apply annually in the spring for the next year's funding. As part of the application, we are required to prepare a proposed Workplan that addresses the programmatic needs of the Estuary Program while also complying with EPA guidelines for the funding. Staff has developed a Workplan that largely continues our major ongoing tasks through the next FY.

As per previous discussions with the Bay Foundation and EC, the additional funding available for FY23 has been put towards expanded monitoring efforts, the State of the Bay report card and events, eelgrass mapping, and staff compensation. Staff time will be spent on providing input on energy projects, expanding opportunities in water conservation in the restoration and education programmatic areas, and staying involved in regional and statewide efforts like the Marine Protected Area (MPA) collaborative, Central Coast Climate Collaborative, new state climate resilience opportunities, and the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary process.

Staff recommends EC approval of the FY23 workplan and budget.

7. **ACTION:** Recommend Approval of EC Bylaw Updates (see attached)

As we discussed in the fall, some changes were needed to the EC bylaws in two specific areas. The first was to broaden the definition of the agricultural interest seat to allow for more options. The second was to clarify that spending approval of money from the Restoration Fund comes from the Executive Officer or their designee, and not from the Central Coast Regional Board board members.

The bylaws also needed a few minor updates related to logistics, including meeting dates, meeting format, chair and vice chair elections, and the role of secretary.

These changes were made in redline/strikeout format and provided to EC members for review in advance of the meeting.

Staff recommends approving these updates to the EC bylaws.

8. ACTION: Recommend Approval of Restoration Fund Spending to Support Eelgrass Work

Staff have been successful at winning funding to support eelgrass monitoring, research, and restoration. One such grant from US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) requires \$3,000 in non-federal match over the five-year grant. Staff is requesting funding from the Restoration Fund as match. The funding is expected to support projects such as eelgrass monitoring, eelgrass mapping, and other efforts to better understand eelgrass in the estuary.

Staff recommends approval of this request for Restoration Funds.

9. DISCUSSION: Presentation of Semi-annual Reports (see attached)

Twice a year, the Estuary Program submits a semi-annual report to EPA, which provides the program status on the budget and tasks laid out in the Workplan. Two reports were developed.

The first report covers the rollover spending from the five-year grant cycle that just ended. EPA granted an extension of six months to finish spending down the funding. The report covers the rollover spending and activities from October 1, 2021 through March 31, 2022. We expended \$195,320, which is 100% of the rollover funding. 100% of the funding from the five-year grant cycle was spent. The Estuary Program met 240% of its match requirement for the cumulative five-year grant with cash match and estimated in-kind contributions at \$7,669,450.

The second report covers the spending for the first half of the FY22 annual grant, from October 1, 2021 through March 31, 2022. We expended \$178,112, which is 25% of the FY22 grant funding. We met 60% of our match requirement for the cumulative five-year grant with cash match and estimated in-kind contributions at \$423,464.

10. DISCUSSION: ANEP and EPA Updates

The Association of National Estuary Programs (ANEP) is currently building support for the NEP budget for FY24 in the House and Senate. Recently, the Congressional Estuary Caucus submitted a letter in support of fully funding the NEP programs at the authorized level of \$50 million, including providing at least \$1 million to each NEP. This letter was signed by 78 members of Congress.

Staff is currently working to incorporate a final round of EPA comments and Estuary Program responses to the CCMP update. A separate Conservation Planning Initiative document is required and will be drafted and submitted to EPA at a later date. Additionally, in response to the last EPA Performance Evaluation (PE) staff is working to develop a public-friendly webpage to show the Estuary Program's progress towards CCMP actions.

11. DISCUSSION: Program Highlights

- **Community Project Update:** The Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District's (CSLRCD) Monarch & Pollinator habitat restoration project is complete, and the educational sign has been installed at the restoration site at Sweet Springs. Dr. Nikki Adams' Microplastics Monitoring Project is continuing their monthly monitoring, with a deadline of this fall. The Harbor Department's spill response project is underway. A four-year supply of oil absorbent pads has been purchased, and staff hand them out for free to local boaters along with our program's Clean Boating educational materials. The Camp KEEP watershed education project has been delayed because of uncertainties over the future of the facility due to COVID concerns. They have just been given permission to resume in person day programs and summer

programs, and they plan to proceed with the Community Project this summer. This delay should not impact the project schedule.

- **Monitoring Update:** Our spring bioassessment monitoring effort is well underway and was completed the first week of May. We have a new site above the Chorro Reservoir and are monitoring two potential sites on upper Pennington Creek to identify a good reference site. Staff provided support for a San Luis Obispo watershed bioassessment effort by Cal Poly and the city of SLO. The fall 2021 eelgrass map is nearing completion, and we expect to have a map and baywide acreage number by early summer.
- **Restoration Project Highlight:** Eelgrass mapping is near completion and results indicate a substantial increase in eelgrass extent. Upcoming restoration/transplant efforts have been canceled and efforts are being redirected towards eelgrass monitoring and identifying opportunities for increasing our understanding of eelgrass habitat. The Lazy LS Ranch easement is expected to close on August 5. At the February 2021 meetings, the Bay Foundation and EC voted to approve \$148,500 towards this easement. This easement will protect 389 acres in the San Bernardo Creek watershed. Additionally, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been developed to acknowledge the CA Military Department's commitment to sustainable water management thought collaboration with the CA Conservation Corps (CCC), Estuary Program, CSLRCD, Watershed Progressive, and Creek Lands Conservation. The MOU confirms access and maintenance for agreed upon water management projects and will be submitted with grant applications as required.
- **Chumash NMS:** Staff continue to participate in Central Coast stakeholder meetings on specific topics like monitoring, research, and climate planning as the proposed sanctuary goes through the process of designation.
- **BIL Updates:** Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funding is being allocated to each NEP, and we are awaiting final guidance from EPA headquarters. We anticipate \$900,000 in supplemental funding that will support projects that further the Comprehensive Conservation & Management Plan (CCMP) and meet guidance criteria. Draft guidance specifies prioritizing projects that focus on climate and equity. Funding will require an annual BIL Workplan and budget with additional reporting requirements. A strategy will be developed to include an overview budget for the full BIL five-year award and a timeline for the use of the BIL funds over time consistent with the goals in the CCMP and BIL priorities.

12. Adjourn to next meeting of August 17, 2022 at 4:00 p.m., to be held remotely via Zoom.

Attachments:

- Minutes from February 16, 2022 EC meeting
- FY2023 Workplan
- EC Bylaws proposed updates
- Semi-annual report for Rollover Funding
- Semi-annual report for FY22 Funding