

Morro Bay National Estuary Program
Program Evaluation Status for 2025
Prepared for the August 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. This report is a running account of relevant activities, with new accomplishments added to the previous version of the report.

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 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. This information has been shared via [blog posts](#) and includes an engaging [video of drone footage](#). In summer 2022, two outreach posters were developed and displayed in the Nature Center to share project information.
- 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 have been reviewing the status of CCMP Action Plans (AP). For some AP, the process requires analysis to determine the optimal metric to track and report. This content will eventually populate a CCMP implementation status webpage with public-friendly content. 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. As the CCMP update is

now undergoing final approval with EPA, development of this internal tracking system can move forward. Staff discussions are underway to solidify metric selection.

- While this larger effort of AP tracking is under development, staff have been developing a short-term solution. Our existing [Our Impact webpage](#) will be enhanced with some AP status information to provide the public with highlights of accomplishments and AP status. This updated page is expected to be complete by the end of the 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 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. Our Communications & Outreach Specialist is now serving as a co-chair for the group. 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 partnership 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. Estuary Program staff are currently working to hire a coordinator to support SLOMPAC grants.
- In 2021, the Estuary Program partnered 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 allowed 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 reached 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. For 2022, staff decided to opt out of participating and focus instead on expanding Mutts for the Bay program social media and other outreach.
- In 2022, the Estuary Program translated our most popular educational handouts into Spanish to better serve our visitors. The 101 brochure and bird guide were translated into Spanish and were 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 continuing to seek 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 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:

- In developing projects for the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funding, Estuary Program staff have focused on projects addressing water conservation and climate change. Some examples include infrastructure for drinking water supply, expanded drought monitoring to identify locations and landowners for potential water conservation projects, the purchase of sensors to accurately track climate change impacts on bay water quality, habitat monitoring and barrier removal to support steelhead trout, and stormwater infrastructure to protect water quality and enhance groundwater supply. More details will be available when the BIL workplan is finalized.
- 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 the 2021 winter storms. 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 undergoing additional work based on EPA comments. 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.