



**Executive Committee Quarterly Meeting  
Via Video Conferencing**

**August 17, 2022  
4:00 pm**

### **Minutes**

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**Attendees:** Ethan Bell, *Stillwater Sciences*; Matt Keeling, *Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board*; Crow White, *Cal Poly*; Blake Fixler, *SLO County*; Bruce Gibson, *SLO County*; Jason Curtis, *Bay Foundation*; Becka Kelly, *Morro Bay Harbor Dept*; Marshall Ochylski, *LOCS*D; Trudy O'Brien, *Morro Bay Commercial Fishermen's Organization*; Suzanne Marr, *USEPA*; Ann Kitajima, *MBNEP Staff*; Melodie Grubbs, *MBNEP Staff*.

#### **1. Introductions and Updates**

- Trudy: Representing the fishermen and women of Morro Bay. No updates as has not been out down on the waterfront. Maritime Museum is putting on an event on October 8 from 10 to 4. An announcement will be out soon for the event, which will feature games, a live auction, and other activities.
- Bruce: Bruce will continue to participate in the Executive Committee until told otherwise. He appreciates our engagement on the new monitoring well in Los Osos as they expand groundwater monitoring. The monitoring wells indicate continued improvement as well levels are rising. Modeling information is being updated. In general, the effort appears to be headed in the right direction in the groundwater basin. Bruce continues on a working group with Coastal Commission on sea level rise adaptation, which helps improve relationships with local jurisdictions and the Commission to help get projects done.
- Marshall: The activity behind the Van Beuren building is drilling for a municipal well. The Los Osos Community Services District (LOCS)D is working with the County and Water Board on a number of things, looking for grant money. The CSD voted to approve a new contract for Ron Munds (general manager) for a four-year term. The Cuesta Inlet area where people store boats and kayaks is up for sale. A nonprofit was established to raise funds to buy the property to ensure open space access.
- Becka: The Harbor Department just received a state grant for \$15,000 for derelict boat removal next year. The Coastal Cleanup Day effort is set for September 17. They are looking for volunteers to help clean up the beach below the Bay Shore Bluff condos, just north of the Inn at Morro Bay. This is a location where people store skiffs and kayaks. The Harbor department shared how the eelgrass wrack is causing interference with their operations, making it difficult to get their boats in and out of the slips. They are looking for feedback on how to keep them operational during this time. They are working on a grant for a pumpout unit.
- Matt: The Water Board meeting will be held in Santa Barbara, but no items on the agenda relate to Morro Bay. There is an upcoming groundwater sustainability workshop and an update for Water Board members on groundwater sustainability agency partners, including the Los Osos Basin Management Committee. The agenda will be out in early October. The Central Coast Water Quality Control Board (CCRWQCB) is working with the California Men's Colony on issues with the wastewater treatment plant and Chorro Creek discharge. CCRWQCB staff did inspections in the spring and observed plastics in the effluent discharge to the creek. They issued a notice of violation to the CMC, and a monitoring plan is needed to measure plastics in the water and determine associated impacts downstream. Historically when the prison has lockdowns, inmates protest by flushing things down the toilets, resulting in sewer line blockages. The facility put in grinder pumps to help with this. The prison started giving inmates plastic bags as liners for their trash cans, and they think this is the source of plastic in the treatment plant discharge. They've since stopped providing them and are conducting additional investigations.
- Jason: Representing the Bay Foundation Board. He will report on Board comments on the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) workplan.

- Crow: No updates from Cal Poly. He was wondering if the two properties at Cuesta Inlet are both under consideration for purchase by the nonprofit. Only the larger parcel going for a \$1M asking price is under consideration. He also asked about the well going in, which is a municipal well for water production.
- Blake: Blake is Bruce's alternate and is attending because Bruce has to leave early.
- Ethan: Stillwater Sciences is gearing up to do pikeminnow management this fall in Chorro Creek. They are also in talks with local collaborators to expand that work not just to control pikeminnow but also to conduct research on steelhead use of the watershed. A goal of the effort is to have better tracking information to see how restoration efforts have increased steelhead in the watershed. They also want to address more specific research questions like how fish use the estuary and the lower Chorro Creek watershed. The project would include tagging of steelhead to look at where they are and how they move through the lower watershed, tidal channels, open bay, and ocean as well as how they utilize eelgrass. They are working with partners to move this effort forward.
- Mel: The Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 funding is currently in the House and Senate. It's looking like the trend of incremental increases in base funding is continuing, and it sounds like each National Estuary Program (NEP) will receive \$800k in funding for FY2024.

## 2. Public Comment

Linda Parks attended the meeting as a member of the public. She plans to retire at the end of the year and is interested in this area. She wanted to find out what kinds of efforts she could be involved with here.

## 3. Agenda Revisions – None.

## 4. ACTION: Consider Approval of May 18, 2022 EC meeting minutes.

**Vote:** Blake motioned to approve, Marshall seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

## 5. ACTION: Recommend Approval of the Fiscal Year 2022 and 2023 BIL Workplan (see attached)

Staff has been hard at work on the FY2022 and 2023 BIL workplan. This has been in the works for a while now. The NEPs were waiting for final guidance from EPA. The NEPs are included as a line item, and between 2022 and 2026, each NEP will get approximately \$4.5M in supplemental funding, awarded each year similar to our base funding. Money is slated to focus on further accelerating actions in our Comprehensive Conservation & Management Plans (CCMP). We started with a broad list of projects, and then prioritized them while considering management plan goals. The workplan is for FY2022 and FY2023, which is the approach recommended by EPA. There is a waiver that eliminates the match requirement for Year 1 and 2 funding. This workplan took into consideration our 320 FY2023 workplan, although the timing will be a little bit different. In the future, we will create the 320 and BIL workplans together.

For this workplan, we focused on high impact projects that are implementation-ready. This includes a variety of climate change and climate planning projects such as working with USGS to further CoSMoS modeling and take it to a habitat level to identify transition zones and develop future projects. Some projects increase our capacity for monitoring to fill data gaps and collect data to support project development. Some activities were tailored to water infrastructure, including installing a monitoring well for Los Osos and implementing stormwater management in the watershed. We have quite a few potential projects for stormwater and plan to hold a series of stakeholder meetings to determine the status, project plans, costs, etc. to determine which to pursue. We may also pursue grant funding to implement more projects. Outreach project highlights include upgrading Nature Center, working with local partners to bring youth out to the bay, and help train teachers throughout the county in estuary science.

Ethan commented that he felt we did a good job of reaching out to local stakeholders that might have input and that the process felt inclusive and transparent. Clearly a lot of work went into it under a time crunch.

Matt appreciates how the NEP is able to leverage the funding they get to increase the capacity for projects. He was pleased that EPA has applied a focus on climate change and environmental justice, and likes how these topics were folded into the workplan as part of both existing and new projects. CCRWQCB has been actively engaged in both of these focus areas. Matt asked how we would ensure that benefits reach disadvantaged communities, and Mel described that tools that NEPs have been exploring to help with this. He also asked how we plan to monitor clean drinking water for surrounding communities. Mel answered that this is tied to the water infrastructure task by partnering with the LOCSD and County Basin Management Committee to install or rehabilitate monitoring wells.

Suzanne asked Matt if there were specific folks in the Water Board to communicate with on drinking water well monitoring. Matt answered that the Water Board has no direct authority with drinking water, as that goes to State Division of Drinking Water. He recommended reach out to James Bishop.

Jason reported on the Bay Foundation comments on the workplan. The Board has been discussing the plan for the past couple of months. The Board directed him to vote for approval. He also wanted to share that members of the Board provided some feedback on things they think should be included: stormwater management (leveraging funding and working with State Parks on the Windy Cove parking area) and encouraging us to increase staffing sooner rather than later to get ready for project implementations. A number of board members were interested in working with the County on the South Bay Blvd bridge project, where we'd like the County to remove some of the fill that could be restricting tidal flows. The Board feels it's worth continuing the conversation with the County.

Becka agrees that this is an amazing opportunity to have a lot of expansion on projects we are already tackling and it seems like increased staffing would be a priority to get projects going. For climate and sea level rise, this are very important for harbor and infrastructure and the efforts provide vital data that is important for understanding what's to come in the future.

**Vote:** Matt motioned to approve the workplan. Jason seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

**6. DISCUSSION:** Program Evaluation (PE) Letter Update (see attached)

Every five years, each of the NEPs undergoes a Program Evaluation process with EPA to review how the program is doing. Continued participation in the program is contingent upon passing this process. The process culminates in a PE letter, which lays out the noteworthy program accomplishments as well as areas for improvement. Twice a year, Estuary Program staff provides an update on the status of activities to address the challenges identified by EPA in the PE letter. Staff described the status of activities underway or planned to address these challenges.

**7. DISCUSSION:** Program Highlights

- **Community Project Updates:** Dr. Nikki Adams' Microplastics Monitoring Project wrapped up their monthly monitoring and the project will be complete by the end of September. The Harbor Department's spill response project is ongoing, with staff distributing oil absorbent pads 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.
- **Monitoring Updates:** We have started sample analysis in our new bacteria lab space in Cuesta's Biology Department. We're training four student volunteers who will support our monitoring effort for the upcoming academic year. Analysis is nearing completion for the 2023 State of the Bay environmental report card, which is due out early next year.
- **Restoration Project Updates:** The 2021 eelgrass map is near completion and results indicate a substantial increase in eelgrass extent. We expect to have a map and baywide acreage number by early fall. A smaller than planned restoration effort took place due to the eelgrass abundance. A baywide lidar

survey was conducted in June, with the data set expected in October. The data will support Cal Poly research efforts and Estuary Program's eelgrass work. The Lazy LS Ranch easement closing is imminent, with the support of \$148,500 of Restoration Funding.

- **Administrative Updates:** The Save the Cuesta Inlet nonprofit has been in contact and one of their members presented at last month's Bay Foundation meeting. The property has a lot of value to the community. However the price is high, and the owner refuses to have an appraisal conducted. The Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District is also maintaining communication with the group to see what happens and what options we have. The NEP doesn't currently have a position on whether it's acquired or not. We are in discussions with the group to see what next steps are if funds were raised to purchase. We could potentially be involved in discussions of future management. Our CCMP update is under final review with EPA. We'll send out the updated document and post it online when it's completed.

8. Adjourn at 5:01 p.m. to the next meeting of November 16, 2022 at 4:00 p.m., to be held remotely via Zoom.