

Morro Bay National Estuary Program
Program Evaluation Status for 2025
Prepared for the February 2023 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. Staff continues to conduct ongoing monitoring of the freshwater seeps along the bay shoreline for nitrates to assess the impact of the Los Osos Water Reclamation Facility.
- 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. Following the large storms in January 2023, analysis is still underway on how the site performed and what repairs are needed. A blog on storm damage and the performance of the CCER project was developed and posted in February.
- Staff are 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 complete, development of this internal tracking system can move forward. Staff discussions are underway to solidify metric selection. Completed tasks are being compiled and tracked for the internal tracking system.

- 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.

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 Community Engagement Coordinator serves 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. In January 2023, the Estuary Program submitted a grant application in partnership with the Monterey MPA Collaborative to print E&O materials translated into Chinese that would be distributed to all MPA Collaboratives in California. The Estuary Program plans to continue participating in the effort to develop outreach efforts and seek funding.
- Educational content currently under development will be bilingual in English and Spanish.
- The Estuary Program has created a formal educational partnership with Camp Ocean Pines in Cambria, CA. This environmental and outdoor education program hosts visiting schools from September to May and hosts traditional summer camps from June to August. Camp Ocean Pines works with local schools and students in the Central Valley, where many recurring visitors to Morro Bay reside. 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 plans to work with Camp KEEP at their outdoor school as they become more established.
- Efforts are underway to host field trips for visiting groups and schools following a suspension due to COVID. Staff planning is underway to host a group of youth from the Fresno area under the California Health Collaboratives' Explore the Coast grant. In addition to educating these students about the estuary, watershed, and the coast, the Estuary Program will also provide information to the students on career paths and opportunities in the environmental field.

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:

- Multiple efforts are underway under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funding to address water conservation and climate change. Contracting is in progress for a monitoring well installation for the community of Los Osos to help ensure the drinking water supply. Expanded drought monitoring work has started, with an expanded network of water level sensors to be installed this spring to help identify locations and landowners for potential water conservation projects. Sensors were purchased to accurately track climate change impacts on bay water quality. Coordination on stormwater management efforts have begun with partners to determine which projects and funding sources should be pursued.
- A partner effort is underway to expand and improve the rainwater storage capacity at Pennington Creek. Creek Lands Conservation, Cal Poly, and the Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District have funding to install four more rainwater catchment tanks and to pursue applying for a water right to divert surface flows into the tanks during the wet season.
- 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 are underway to look at how the site fared with the January 2023 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 with a focus on the development of numeric targets. 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.