



Executive Committee Quarterly Meeting
Via Video Conferencing

May 17, 2023
4:00 pm

Minutes

Attendees: Ethan Bell, *Stillwater Sciences*; Matt Keeling, *Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board*; Emily Bockmon, *Cal Poly*; Jason Curtis, *Bay Foundation*; Lisen Bonnier, *Ag interest seat*; John Flaherty, *Tourism interest seat*; Blake Fixler, *SLO County*; Marshall Ochylski, *LOCSD*; Trudy O'Brien, *Commercial Fishermen*; Suzanne Marr, *USEPA*; Ann Kitajima, *MBNEP Staff*; Melodie Grubbs, *MBNEP Staff*.

1. Introductions and Updates

- Lisen: Spring has brought green grass and flowers, which is covering the erosion issues from the winter. Lisen had a record 56" of rain on her farm this winter. Farmers will likely be addressing the storm damage throughout the year. Is interested to know how many farmer's got FEMA funding and will share that information with us.
- Trudy: Crab season has ended, due to spotting of whales. No salmon season this year. For Memorial Day, a Lost at Sea ceremony will be held in Cayucos for the 22nd year. It will be at 3 p.m. on May 29.
- Blake: At the last meeting, the group discussed how technically Supervisor Gibson was no longer representing Morro Bay and Los Osos. Now he is once again representing those two communities. The County is still responding to storm impacts, including working on road issues and starting to prepare for future storms.
- Matt: Recommended Lisen reach out to Jean-Pierre Wolff who has a new role related to USDA funding, some of which is available for storm recovery. The 401 program is still dealing with storm damage. In some cases they are allowing people to do repairs in a streamlined process and then following up afterward. There is also broad discussions with the community due to the flooding in the Salinas Valley and how to move forward. Matt is retiring this year, and August will be his last meeting. They are identifying his replacement for the EC, and hopefully they will both attend the August meeting.
- John: The extreme winter weather impacted business. Spring has seen somewhat of a recovery, especially with spring break crowds. The Ironman triathlon event this weekend will have almost 2,000 participants. Highway 1 and the roads around town will be closed, but State Park Marina will remain open.
- Marshall: Winter storms brought a lot of flooding to Vista de Oro and Pine St., resulting in red and yellow tagging of a number of structures and flooding of houses. Seems like almost everyone is satisfied with the compensation they received from FEMA. Concerned about sedimentation in the bay due to the winter storms and the long-term decreases in the volume of the bay over time. Hopefully something can be done to reduce sediment inputs and remove sediment.
- Emily: Crow's alternate and a marine chemistry professor at Cal Poly. Emily was contacted by a professor at Cal Poly concerned about the ecological impacts on the bay of the Ironman event. It might be preferable to have the swim in the ocean rather than the bay to minimize wildlife disturbance. There is another round of funding from a private donor, Santa Rosa Creek Foundation, will fund research work in Morro Bay for 2023-24.
- Suzanne: Glad to be visiting in person to look at storm impacts. At EPA, they are trying to get a lot of funding out of the door.
- Ethan: Stillwater has been working with the city of San Luis Obispo on flood issues. They hope that in addressing flood impacts, work can continue to integrate enhancement of habitat. Steelhead research in the Chorro watershed will increase with a project to tag juvenile steelhead to see where growth occurs, when the fish in and out migrating, how they are using the lower watershed, etc. The Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District has been pursuing funding to assess and treat the Chorro Flats area, which was designed to trap sediment but has likely reached capacity. The project would look at

alternatives to increase capacity for flood control and sediment deposition. Matt commented that he's observed that the creeks look good around the region since the high flows swept away a lot of the fine sediment and asked whether Stillwater was anticipating increased salmonid presence and more spawning. Ethan thinks so. Increased flows means adults can access more habitat, and intermittent reaches are now flowing so expecting a real boon in steelhead production. They haven't yet noticed signs of improvement, but it's hard to see steelhead redds during high flows. Late summer/fall monitoring should indicate if there is an increase in distribution and abundance.

- Jason: representing the Bay Foundation.
- Ann: Estuary Program Assistant Director.
- Mel: Estuary Program Executive Director.

2. Public Comment

None.

3. Agenda Revisions – None.

4. ACTION: Consider Approval of February 15, 2023 EC meeting minutes.

Vote: Blake motioned to approve. Lisen seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

5. ACTION: Approval of Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) Equity Strategy and Long-Term Strategy (see attached)

It is a requirement of BIL funding for each National Estuary Program (NEP) develop a Long-Term Strategy, part of which is an Equity Strategy. The BIL funding is structured similarly to our 320 grant, with an annual workplan and semi-annual reports. An Equity Strategy is required for each program to continue to receive a waiver on the match requirement.

Staff developed a spreadsheet with potential projects for five focus areas: Monitoring, Restoration, Education, Capacity Building, and Water Infrastructure. Staff prioritized projects based on readiness, climate impacts, and equity considerations. The Long-Term strategy mimics the themes of the Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 and 2023 BIL workplan. It is considered to be a living document that will be reevaluated each year as we prepare our BIL workplans. Projects include drought monitoring, steelhead habitat, an estuary fisheries baseline study, a research partnership with USGS on sea level rise modeling, groundwater monitoring well installation, stormwater management projects, fish passage restoration, upgrades to the Nature Center, and development of teacher training program.

Matt commented that the plan looks well-balanced and builds on focus areas we've done well in. He asked specifically in which areas we are planning to increase our capacity. Staff highlighted stormwater management, studies to focus on climate impacts, education capacity building, and community-based restoration. Matt asked about our education impact on events like the Ironman triathlon. For the November Morro Bay Triathlon, we were the featured nonprofit and as part of the event we held a clean-up, conducted educational tabling, and shared clean water data and messaging.

Ethan commented that the plan looked like a good mix of projects. Capacity building is good to ensure we have adequate staff to lead all of these diverse efforts.

Suzanne asked about the process if EPA has comments that require changing the plans. Staff would make the changes and send the plan out to the Management Committee to ensure they were aware of any updates.

Vote: Matt moves to approve both. John seconds. All in favor. None opposed.

6. ACTION: Approval of Workplan for 320 Grant for FY2024 (see attached)

Based on discussion at the February EC meeting, staff created a 320 workplan for FY2024. Funding is expected to increase from \$750,000 to \$850,000 for next year. Our 320 workplan is similar to past workplans. Some projects are now complete and won't be included for FY2024, including eelgrass restoration. We are adding a task on Comprehensive Conservation & Management Plan (CCMP) performance measures, a fisheries management project of steelhead in the Chorro watershed, and additional support for student fellowships, analytical laboratory costs, and staff compensation.

Matt commented that the Water Board was also seeing steep increases in laboratory costs, and Suzanne asked if we knew why. Staff speculated that it was due to the lab being acquired by an international company recently, as well as inflationary pressures. Emily mentioned that Cal Poly was currently looking at building research capacity, and there might be opportunities for future partnership on lab analysis.

Vote: Matt moved to approve the workplan. John seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

7. ACTION: Recommendations on Community Project Application (See attached)

Staff presented the proposed One Cool Earth (OCE) project to provide watershed education for Baywood Elementary School for the 2023 to 2024 academic year. Staff explained that \$10,000 of Community Project funding from FY2022 was not utilized since the Camp KEEP project did not proceed. This funding in combination with funding from the FY2024 Community Project budget would allow full funding of OCE's requested \$20,000 budget. Staff described the details of the project, budget, reviewer input, and organizational capacity.

John asked if there were other projects that applied and were dropped during the process. Staff explained that we typically do not offer a round of funding in the spring, but because of the unused funding from FY2022, we developed a project in this extra round of funding. Thus, only this one project was developed.

Ethan thought the project looked great and that it could create change for years to come. He expressed concern about funding it beyond the one year and asked if the project would be able to continue at the school if future funding was not available. OCE is often able to secure additional funding and partnerships to continue their programming, and they will not seek funding from the Estuary Program beyond this one year. OCE works with teachers to build capacity and share curriculum so that even if the program cannot continue in full in future years, the school is better equipped to move forward with watershed education on its own.

There was discussion about this amount of spending cutting in to the Community Projects that could occur in FY2024. Staff responded that we requested additional budget for FY2024 Community Projects. Rather than the typical \$15,000 annual budget, staff asked for \$20,000, half of which would support the OCE project and half could support a project or projects to be developed. Jason commented that the Bay Foundation recognized that project would take up half the spending for FY2024 but considered it to be worth the investment.

Vote: Jason moved to approve the Community Project application. Blake seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

8. DISCUSSION: BIL and 320 Semi-annual Reports (see attached)

Staff presented the budget status of the two grants and explained how the contracting delays slowed down spending on the BIL funds.

9. DISCUSSION: Program Highlights

- **Community Projects:** Staff provided a status update on the two ongoing Community Projects.
- **Administrative Updates:** The BIL workplan will be developed on a shifted schedule from the 320 workplan based on the expected timing of the funding, likely in January. We will discuss potential projects for the BIL workplan at the August EC meeting. We are currently hiring administrative support with BIL funding.
- **National Marine Sanctuary Update:** NOAA presented to us a year ago on the proposed NMS. They are a bit behind the original projected schedule for the process. Staff reached out to NOAA for an update. They are expecting the draft management documents to be released this spring. One of the proposed boundaries will include portions of the estuary. We will share the documents with the EC once they are made available.
- **Format of Future Meetings:** Mel queried the group as to whether there was any interest in returning to in-person meetings. Some felt that the logistics of remote attendance worked better, while others preferred an in-person meeting. We will move forward with hybrid meetings starting in August, and members have the option to either attend in-person or via Zoom.

10. Adjourned at 5:20 p.m. to the next meeting of August 16, 2023 at 4:00 p.m., to be held in-person and via Zoom.