



**Executive Committee Quarterly Meeting
Estuary Program Offices, Morro Bay, CA
and via Video Conferencing**

**August 16, 2023
4:00 pm**

Minutes

Attendees: Ethan Bell, *Stillwater Sciences*; Matt Keeling, *Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board*; Phil Hammer, *Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board*; Crow White, *Cal Poly*; Lisen Bonnier, *Ag interest seat*; Blake Fixler, *SLO County*; Becka Kelly, *Morro Bay Harbor Department*; Zara Landrum, *City of Morro Bay*; Suzanne Marr, *USEPA*; Ann Kitajima, *MBNEP Staff*; Melodie Grubbs, *MBNEP Staff*.

1. Introductions and Updates

- Becka: Had a busy summer so far. Summer is winding down. Got quite a few boats stacked up for demolition for this winter. Trying to keep up with facility upgrades. Hurricane pushing towards us this week, waiting to see if affects us up here.
- Matt: Governor's office issued an executive order on Aug 4 to help expedite repair work in surface waters from flood related damage. This exempts certain provisions of Fish and Wildlife code related to stream bed alteration agreements, water quality certification provisions (waste discharge requirements), 401 certifications, and CA Environmental Quality Act requirements. This allows property owners to do vegetation/debris removal, sediment removal, and levee repair due to damage from storms from late 2022 through spring 2023. Matt is retiring from the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (CCRWQCB), and his last day is Sept 29. Phil Hammer will be the new CCRWQCB representative on the Executive Committee (EC). He is the CCRWQCB's current stormwater program manager and their 'acting' 401 certification program manager. Phil will be a good fit with his knowledge of the watershed and background. Matt comments that participating in the EC is one of the fun parts of his job, and he really enjoyed participating.
- Phil: Excited to be joining the group and looking forward to being in a non-regulatory role. He has bachelor's and master's degrees in environmental science from UC Santa Barbara. He's been with the CCRWQCB for 15 years and is now a Senior Environmental Scientist. Most of his work has been managing the stormwater program. He's also worked in 401 permitting to minimize impacts from projects in waterbodies. He's been involved with National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES), grants, Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL), etc. He is a resident of Morro Bay.
- Zara: Serves on the Morro Bay City Council.
- Crow White: Serves as the science representative. No updates, but nice to be here in person.
- Blake: Legislative Assistant to Bruce Gibson. A lot going on at the county but not much relevant to this group.
- Lisen: Everyone out farming as it's high season. Rain looming next week is making everyone a little nervous.
- Suzanne: Keeping money coming from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). Some added reporting due to BIL funding, so EPA is helping us with that, getting all the processes in place. A lot of end of fiscal year activity right now.
- Ethan: Serves as the environmental representative, he is with Stillwater Sciences, and he is the EC chair. They are getting ready to go out into Chorro Creek to monitor juvenile steelhead populations. They'll be looking at how much time the fish spend/grow in each portion of the watershed (Chorro Flats versus upper watershed). They will also be doing pikeminnow management. They are hoping to work with us and the Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District (CSLRCD) on some additional restoration work at Chorro Flats. In the fall, they will begin a comprehensive sampling effort to look at estuarine fish using a variety of different capture techniques. We want to understand how fish are using different habitats in the bay compared to historically, especially following the eelgrass recovery.

- Ann: Estuary Program Assistant Director.
- Mel: Estuary Program Executive Director.

2. Public Comment

None.

3. Agenda Revisions

None.

4. **ACTION:** Consider Approval of May 17, 2023 EC meeting minutes (see attached).

Vote: Crow motioned to approve. Matt seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

5. **ACTION:** EC Chair and Vice Chair Elections

Staff explained the upcoming end of terms for the Chair and Vice Chair positions. EC agreed it made sense to have terms for both positions on the same schedule. Staff proposed electing Jason to a second consecutive term as Vice Chair. In February when Ethan's term as Chair ends, we would elect Jason as Chair and elect a new Vice Chair. In staff discussions with Becca, she is interested in filling the Vice Chair role in February.

Vote: Becca moves to reelect Jason as Vice Chair. Zara seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

6. **DISCUSSION:** EC Membership

The government at large position was filled by the State Coastal Conservancy (SCC) for several years, and they've been a partner on several projects. When Sam Schuchat retired as Executive Officer, the SCC took a temporary break from serving on the EC. But they let us know recently that they're too busy to rejoin the EC, as they are dealing with getting a lot of funding out the door. We are seeking a new government at large organization to serve on the EC.

Suzanne recommended having someone from the Northern Chumash tribe serve. Mel mentioned that staff had discussed that if a National Marine Sanctuary (NMS) is established that includes the estuary, it would make sense to establish a new seat on the EC for the NMS and the tribes would also be involved. Ethan liked that idea.

Ethan proposed the CSLRCD as a potential member. As they partner frequently on projects, it seems like a good fit.

Zara recommended reaching out to the Salinan tribe as well.

Becca recommended State Parks. Chad Jackson is their environmental rep and represents the tribes as well for State Parks.

If members have ideas, please let staff know. We will begin pursuing these ideas.

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

Staff presented the highlights of activities conducted to address areas for improvement identified by EPA in the last Program Evaluation.

8. **DISCUSSION:** Program Highlights

- **Administrative Updates:** The BIL workplan for Fiscal Year 2024 will be presented for a vote at the November EC meeting.
- **Monitoring Updates:** Eelgrass mapping is underway. We are expecting to see reduced acreage from the 2021 map. Bioassessment monitoring was completed this spring, with results available in the fall.
- **Restoration Updates:** We are moving forward with several BIL projects, including historical ecology work with SFEI, pikeminnow and steelhead management, estuarine fisheries surveying, and USGS work on tidal marsh monitoring and sea level rise (SLR) modeling. We are also working on our Conservation Planning Initiative, a requirement as part of the Comprehensive Conservation & Management Plan. We are looking for opportunities to engage the community in hands-on restoration and would like to develop a project with the CSLRCD at the Los Osos Wetland project. Ethan was really excited to see the historical ecology effort with SFEI. Phil was interested in the SLR modeling, in particular as it relates to stormwater impacts.
- **Education & Outreach Updates:** We've been very busy in this program area. We've restarted field trips. We have two new exhibits in the Nature Center. Visitorship is up in the Nature Center. We've also hosted a series of teacher trainings focused on estuary science. Suzanne commented that there was a great range of activities in this program area.

9. Adjourned at 4:54 p.m. to the next meeting of November 15, 2023 at 4:00 p.m., to be held via Zoom only (no in person component) due to staff travel.