



Executive Committee Quarterly Meeting
Via Video Conferencing

November 15, 2023
4:00 pm

Minutes

Attendees: Ethan Bell, *Stillwater Sciences*; Phil Hammer, *Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board*; Becka Kelly, *Morro Bay Harbor Department*; Jason Curtis, *Bay Foundation of Morro Bay*; John Flaherty, *Recreation/Tourism seat*; Trudy O'Brien, *Commercial fishing seat*; Marshall Ochylski, *Los Osos CSD*; Kate Ballantyne, *SLO County Public Works*; Suzanne Marr, *USEPA*; Ann Kitajima, *MBNEP Staff*; Melodie Grubbs, *MBNEP Staff*.

1. Introductions and Updates

- Ethan: Stillwater Sciences is working with the Estuary Program on invasive pikeminnow management in Chorro Creek. The fall effort is now completed. The pikeminnow were smaller than in past years due to prior management efforts. They saw more of the larger juvenile steelhead than in the past. Part of the effort involved inserting microchips into the steelhead so that their movements through lower Chorro Creek can be tracked. They've detected fish moving up into Chorro, but have not yet seen them out migrate. They will provide updates to interested partners on what they're detecting.
- Jason: Vice President of Instruction at Cuesta College, serves on the Bay Foundation Board, is a representative of the Bay Foundation Board to the Executive Committee (EC).
- John: Central Coast Outdoors. Not a lot to report, tourism is slowing down for the fall. Very strong early returns for Morro Bay Bird Festival, with all kayak trips sold out and hardly any space left on other fieldtrips. So if weather cooperates, it should be a successful festival. The recent Witches' Paddle had a lot of attendees, which unfortunately caused some traffic and parking problems.
- Phil: Senior Environmental Scientist for the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board. On the December 14 and 15 Water Board agenda is an informational item on the proposed Chumash National Marine Sanctuary.
- Trudy: Representing the commercial fishermen/women of Morro Bay. The crab fishery hasn't been opened yet. It's been closed due to whale interaction and will be reconsidered for opening after the first of the year. Rock cod is shut down from Crescent City to Point Conception. Fishermen are concerned. Likely to reopen after first of year. Santa Monica Seafood just pulled out of the dock in Morro Bay, by Dockside, due to the nearshore rock cod being closed. Working on the wind farm situation. Zara held an informative town hall on the topic over the weekend and did a great job.
- Marshall: Representing the Los Osos Community Services District (LOCSD). Not a lot to report. They are working to find an outside source of water, maybe from Morro Bay, a desalination plant, etc. This is several years down the road.
- Becka: The Morro Bay Harbor Department is putting out a bid for proposals for eight boats to be demolished. Not all the boats are an immediate threat to spill, but some are. They're hoping to have them removed by December 20. They will be assessing the condition of other boats before the winter weather really starts hitting.
- Kate: Public Works SLO County. Her background is as soil scientist and archaeologist. She's worked in San Luis Obispo (SLO) County for her entire career, initially as an environmental consultant and then for 20 years with County Public Works. She spent most of that time leading the Environmental Division and the last five years as Deputy Director. She oversees water, wastewater, long-term water planning, the desalination project, flood planning, environmental review, and stormwater.
- Suzanne: Project Officer from EPA for the Estuary Program. Part of the Water Division in San Francisco.
- Mel: Executive Director of Estuary Program.

- Ann: Assistant Director of the Estuary Program. Future EC meeting dates for 2024 are February 21, May 15, Aug 21, and Nov 20. We will be hosting a Science on Tap event on Thursday, Dec 7 from 6 to 7:30 with a presentation on climate change data for Morro Bay and on a partnership with the United States Geological Survey (USGS) to study sea level rise impacts on tidal marsh. Morro Bay has two arrays of sensors that are part of the Central & Northern California Ocean Observing System (CeNCOOS) network. The meteorological station equipment in the front bay finally died back in the spring, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) does not have budget to replace it. The cost is approximately \$20k to \$25k. We believe NOAA would fund the installation and maintenance of the equipment. If that's the case, we would be interested in using Restoration Funding to purchase replacement equipment. We are still in conversations with NOAA and will update the group as appropriate.

2. Public Comment

None.

3. Agenda Revisions

Staff requested to have the EC membership vote precede any other action items so that Kate, the proposed Government-At-Large representative, could vote on all remaining actions for the meeting.

4. **ACTION:** EC Membership Vote

Following our discussion in August, we reached out to the SLO County Public Works Department to determine if they would be interested in serving on the EC. As the Estuary Program and the County are involved in similar efforts to protect and restore habitats, staff felt that they were a good fit for the EC. Staff reached out to Public Works staff, and the County put forth Deputy Director of Public Works Kate Ballantyne as an EC member and Director of Public Works John Diodati as the alternate.

Vote: Becka moves to approve Kate as the EC member and John as the alternate. Jason seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

5. **ACTION:** Consider Approval of August 16, 2023 EC meeting minutes (see attached)

Vote: Marshall motioned to approve. John seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

6. **ACTION:** Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 Workplan Approval (see attached)

Staff presented a BIL workplan and budget for \$910,000 for FY2024. Workplan tasks are the same as those in the FY2022/2023 BIL workplan, as most projects are multi-year efforts. Staff capacity is similar for FY24 as in the previous BIL workplan. Mel described the major projects in restoration, monitoring, education, and capacity building. We expect the funding to be available in the January/February timeframe.

Jason commented that the Bay Foundation reviewed and approved the workplan at their meeting the previous week. The Board appreciates staff's efforts to develop and manage multiple workplans and funding sources. Ethan commented that the workplan looks like a great diversity of projects, plus capacity building.

Mel reminded members that in the spring, we'll start considering ideas for the next BIL workplan, so please reach out to staff if you have feedback on priorities, new projects, etc.

Vote: Becka motioned to approve the FY2024 BIL workplan and budget. John seconded the motion. All in favor. None opposed.

7. **DISCUSSION:** 320 and BIL Semi-annual Reports for FY2023 (see attached)

Staff presented the BIL and 320 semi-annual reports which summarize the progress and budget status for the second half of FY2023.

8. **DISCUSSION:** Program Highlights

- **Community Projects Updates:** Staff present the status of the three ongoing Community Projects and encouraged EC members to think about potential efforts or partners for future projects.
- **Administrative Updates:** Staff are hiring a Monitoring Technician. Several staff are attending the Coastal Estuarine Research Federation conference and the ANEP conference in Portland, OR.
- **Monitoring Updates:** Staff described the ongoing bay fish monitoring work. Staff described a new toxicity monitoring effort. Eelgrass mapping is underway.
- **Restoration Updates:** Staff described ice plant management work on the city-owned portion of the sand spit. We received a climate action grant through UCSB which brings experienced restoration practitioners from around the state to our area, using the sand spit dunes as a case study on beach and dune restoration.
- **Education & Outreach Updates:** Staff completed three teacher trainings this year. We have our second Science on Tap event coming up. The Nature Center is undergoing quite a few updates, with more interactive exhibits, a kids activity center, and updated signage

9. Kate motioned to adjourn. John seconded. All in favor. None opposed. Adjourned at 5:04 p.m. to the next meeting of February 21, 2024 at 4:00 p.m., to be held via Zoom and in the Morro Bay offices.