



**Executive Committee Quarterly Meeting  
Estuary Program Offices, Morro Bay, CA  
via Video Conference Call**

**February 21, 2024  
4:00 pm**

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**Staff Report**

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1. Introductions and Updates
2. Public Comment
3. Agenda Revisions
4. **ACTION:** Consider Approval of November 15, 2023 Executive Committee (EC) minutes (see attached)
5. **ACTION:** EC Chair and Vice Chair Vote

As we discussed at our August meeting, the terms of Chair and Vice Chair are coming up for a vote. We re-elected Jason as Vice Chair in August, and we discussed then electing him as Chair in February when Ethan's second term ends. We also put forth Becka's name as a good candidate for Vice Chair. With this election, both positions will be on the same time-frame for their two-year terms.

Staff recommend approving Jason's election as EC Chair and Becka's election as EC Vice Chair.

6. **ACTION:** EC Bylaw Approval (see attached)

The Estuary Program's applications for EPA grants each year include numerous requirements related to federal regulations. One area where these requirements have recently been expanded is in non-discrimination (ND). To help meet these requirements, we have been examining nearly all aspects of our program to ensure that the ND policies are being met.

One area needing ND updating was determined to be the ED bylaws. The EC meetings are open to the public so we must ensure that they are adequately publicized and managed to be accessible to all who wish to attend. To address this, we have updated some of the language in the EC bylaws.

Staff recommend approval of the proposed bylaw updates.

7. **DISCUSSION:** 320 Workplan Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Discussion

Each year at our February meeting, the EC discusses the potential workplan tasks for the upcoming grant and determines if any additions are needed. The additional funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) grant has resulted in a shift in our spending approach. We now tend to focus our 320 funding on staffing and other ongoing operational costs, while BIL funding is used to support short-term projects. Thus, the proposed workplan tasks for FY25 for the 320 funding are expected to be the same as for FY24. At this time, the funding amount for FY25 is not yet known, so we are holding these initial workplan discussions assuming the same amount of funding as for FY24, which is \$850,000

There are a few new projects that are expected to be funded by 320 money, and all are in the restoration arena. These could include permitting and planning for repairs to storm damage at Chorro Creek

Ecological Reserve (CCER), restoration work on Walters Creek to improve habitat quality, and small projects with partners like the Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District.

The following are the expected workplan tasks for FY25, including any major changes.

### **Workplan Task Categories for 320 in FY25:**

#### **Restoration and Conservation**

- Habitat Protection (includes conservation)
- Restoration Maintenance and Monitoring
- Other Restoration
- Restoration Project Development
- ~~CCER Maintenance and Monitoring~~ (combined with Restoration Maintenance/Monitoring Task)
- Fisheries Management (previously Aquatic Invasive Species (Pikeminnow) Management)

#### **Monitoring and Research**

- Monitoring Program Coordination
- Reporting and Analysis
- Data Management
- Quality Assurance
- Project Effectiveness Monitoring
- Eelgrass Monitoring and Research
- Partner Research Efforts

#### **Education and Outreach**

- Communications
- Education
- Nature Center Update
- ~~Community Partner Projects~~ (combined with Other E&O Tasks)
- Other E&O Tasks
- Mutts for the Bay

#### **Program Administration**

- Manage Committees and Partnerships
- Grants and Contracts Administration and Financial Management
- General Administration and Human Resources Management
- Tracking Implementation of the Management Plan and Workplan
- Community Projects Program

### **8. DISCUSSION:** Program Evaluation update (see attached)

Every five years, each Estuary Program undergoes a Program Evaluation (PE) process with EPA to review our progress, procedures, and operations to ensure we are meeting the requirements to be part of the National Estuary Program. The final result of this process is a letter from EPA, reconfirming our eligibility for the program. The letter highlights areas where we are doing well and brings up areas for

improvement before the next PE in five years. Twice a year, staff creates a summary for the EC on the status of those areas of improvement. Staff feel they are on track to fully address EPA's feedback prior to the next PE process in 2025.

## 9. **DISCUSSION:** Program Highlights

- **Community Project Updates:** Two Community Projects are underway. For the phytoplankton monitoring project, data collection concluded in January and the focus now shifts to analysis. The results are expected to be ready this summer. Our FY24 project for One Cool Earth to support outdoor environmental education at Baywood Elementary began in August and is proceeding as planned. Unfortunately, the trash management project with the Los Osos Community Services District (LOCSO) hit numerous roadblocks. These challenges plus limited staff capacity for the project led us to mutually agree to end the Community Project agreement with the LOCSO. Staff will continue the proposed outreach component of the project focused on public education around marine debris.
- **Administrative Updates:** A new full-time Monitoring Technician started in January, and a part-time technician will start in March to support our busy spring monitoring season. The Spring ANEP meeting in DC will occur at the end of April. The FY25 BIL Workplan and Budget is being processed with EPA, and we expect our grant agreement to be effective by March 2024.
- **Monitoring Updates:** The Monitoring Program has been focused on creek water quality monitoring as flows have increased with the winter rains. A drone flight in partnership with Cal Poly is currently underway to support tracking eelgrass health. The baywide eelgrass map being developed by Merkel & Associates has been delayed due to challenges with classifying the eelgrass. A draft map is expected soon. A new recreational use monitoring protocol will be starting this spring to track visitor use at popular access spots around the bay.
- **Restoration Updates:** The first phase of invasive ice plant management on the sandspit was completed in the fall. This project is funded through BIL and US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), with additional monitoring as part of a UC Santa Barbara Climate Action grant evaluating dune restoration across the state. Other restoration projects that are underway include a historical ecology study led by San Francisco Estuary Institute, initial studies to evaluate conditions and options for addressing steelhead passage barriers on San Luisito Creek, and stormwater improvement studies and prioritization on Camp SLO.
- **Education and Outreach Updates:** Estuary Program staff is planning another series of teacher training courses for this spring in partnership with Cal Poly and State Parks. Field trips are being scheduled for the spring and summer. We have a Science on Tap event planned for mid-March. Nature Center updates continue. Staff is regularly tabling at SLO and Morro Bay farmer's markets and attending other local events.

10. Adjourn to next meeting of May 15, 2024 at 4:00 p.m., which will be hybrid with some attendees participating via Zoom and others meeting in the Estuary Program office.

### **Attachments:**

- Minutes from November 15, 2023 EC meeting
- EC Bylaws
- Program Evaluation Update