



CLEAN WATER ACT SECTION 320 BASE FUNDING GRANT
WORK PLAN & BUDGET
FOR
FISCAL YEAR 2026

**MORRO BAY NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM
CLEAN WATER ACT SECTION 320 GRANT
WORK PROGRAM & BUDGET
FISCAL YEAR 2026**

Contents

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Goals for CCMP Implementation in Fiscal Year 2026	5
3.	Budget and Staff Elements	6
	Table 3.1: Budget Overview for FY26.....	6
	Table 3.2: Budget Detail of Direct Expenses by Program Area	7
	Table 3.3: Summary of 320 Spending and Match for FY26.....	8
	Compliance with Build America Buy America (BABA) Act Requirements.....	10
4.	New and Ongoing Project Information.....	10
	Habitat Protection and Restoration Activities	10
	Environmental Monitoring and Research	14
	Public Participation, Education and Outreach	20
	Program Management	24
5.	Accomplishments.....	27
6.	Recurring Extreme Weather Event Risk(s) Considered	30
7.	Travel Expenses	30
8.	Acronym List	31

1. Introduction

The Morro Bay National Estuary Program (Estuary Program) is a locally driven, non-regulatory program established under Section 320 of the Clean Water Act (CWA) and further supported by the Protect and Restore America's Estuaries Act (PRAE Act). As one of 28 National Estuary Programs (NEPs) across the country, the Estuary Program works in partnership with federal, state, and local agencies, as well as community stakeholders, to protect and restore the health of Morro Bay and its watershed. The program operates under the guidance of its Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) which serves as a strategic framework for addressing key water quality, habitat, and resource management challenges in the region.

This Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) workplan outlines the Estuary Program's priority actions for the coming year for Clean Water Act Section 320 base funding from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). These resources allow the Estuary Program to accelerate progress on its CCMP goals in ways that directly support the objectives of the CWA and PRAE Act – enhancing water quality, strengthening habitat resilience, and ensuring the long-term health of the estuary for both ecological and economic benefits.

The proposed work aligns with the federal commitment to improving water infrastructure, supporting coastal and watershed resilience, and ensuring that local communities benefit from sustainable resource management. Through targeted initiatives, the Estuary Program will advance efforts to reduce pollutants, restore critical habitats, and enhance the natural processes that sustain Morro Bay's estuarine ecosystem. In doing so, the program supports the national priorities through the Core Programs of Section 320 of the CWA: establishing water quality standards; identifying polluted waters and developing plans to restore them; addressing diffuse, nonpoint sources of pollution; protecting wetlands; and protecting coastal waters through the National Estuary Program. These efforts protect water resources and foster collaboration among agencies, industries, and local stakeholders.

The National Estuary Program was originally enacted in 1987 when the CWA was amended to establish the program. As stated in the act, the purpose of the program is to:

- "assess trends in water quality, natural resources, and uses of the estuary";
- "collect, characterize, and assess data on toxics, nutrients, and natural resources within the estuarine zone to identify the cause of environmental problems";
- "develop the relationship between the in-place loads and point and nonpoint loading of pollutants to the estuarine zone and the potential uses of the zone, water quality, and natural resources";
- "develop a comprehensive conservation and management plan that— (A) recommends priority corrective actions and compliance schedules addressing point and nonpoint sources of pollution to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the estuary, including restoration and maintenance of water quality, a balanced indigenous population of shellfish, fish and wildlife, and recreational activities in the estuary, and assure that the designated uses of the estuary are protected; (B) addresses the effects of recurring extreme weather events on the estuary, including the identification and assessment of vulnerabilities in the estuary and the development and implementation of adaptation strategies; and (C) increases public education and awareness of the ecological health and water quality conditions of the estuary"; and
- "monitor the effectiveness of actions taken pursuant to the plan."

On January 13, 2021, the PRAE Act was signed into law to recognize the economic and environmental importance of wetlands and coastlines. The purpose of the act is to "address the recurring extreme weather events on the estuary, including the identification and assessment of vulnerabilities in the estuary and the development and implementation of adaptation strategies," and "increase public education and awareness of the ecological health and water quality conditions of the estuary."

By investing in science-based management actions and community-driven solutions, the Estuary Program continues to uphold the intent of the Clean Water Act and the PRAE Act, ensuring that Morro Bay remains a thriving natural resource for future generations.

The Estuary Program works to protect and restore the Morro Bay estuary and its watershed through the implementation of our CCMP for Morro Bay, which was updated in 2022. The three Estuary Program programmatic focus areas are: (1) habitat protection and restoration, (2) environmental monitoring and research, and (3) public participation, education, and outreach. This workplan describes the planned efforts for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026, which covers the period from October 1, 2025 through September 30, 2026.

Morro Bay was accepted into the National Estuary Program in 1995 when the Administrator of the EPA accepted Governor Wilson's nomination of the program. With financial support from EPA, Estuary Program staff worked with government agencies, non-profits, businesses, and the local community to develop a watershed-based management plan, the CCMP. This plan defines the priority issues facing the estuary and watershed, and identifies specific Action Plans to address them. It also defines the management structure of the organization, which is based on collaboration and partnerships between the many groups that make up the Estuary Program.

The EPA formally approved the Estuary Program's CCMP in January 2001 and has continued to provide significant grant funding to further the implementation of that plan. Almost every CCMP action plan was initiated, and nearly half are either complete or fully in place and ongoing. The CCMP was revised in 2012 through a public process and approved by the Estuary Program's Management Conference in February 2013. The CCMP was updated in 2022, with approval by the Estuary Program's Management Conference. Various action plans from the CCMP are referenced in this workplan. The Estuary Program works with its many partners to implement these actions in the watershed.

Congress allocates funding for the NEP under Section 320 of the CWA. EPA provides a portion of those funds to each of the 28 National Estuaries. The expected funding available to the Estuary Program through these Section 320 funds for FY25 is \$850,000.

The Bay Foundation of Morro Bay, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation, will continue to serve as the legal and fiscal agent for the Estuary Program by employing staff, signing contracts, and applying for grants. The Estuary Program Executive Committee (EC) oversees the progress of the annual workplan and is the policy decision-making body for the Estuary Program. The Section 320 base funding requires a non-federal match of at least one-to-one. The Estuary Program will meet that match through direct expenditures of private, local, and state funds awarded directly to the Estuary Program, and through tracking the in-kind match that our many partner organizations are spending to help implement the Management Plan.

The Estuary Program is excited to continue the work to protect and restore the Morro Bay estuary and watershed and are thankful for the financial and technical support of EPA, as well as the ongoing participation of many partners in the Morro Bay watershed and beyond.

Management Conference Structure and Membership

Technical Advisory Committees – The Technical Advisory Committees (TAC) are composed of experts in various areas that provide technical advice and input to the program. These TACs are formed for specific technical topics such as Sedimentation, Fisheries Management, Estuarine Habitats, and Education and Outreach. These TACs provide advice to staff in many areas: collaborating and reviewing Community Project options, investigating technical issues, providing advisory oversight to monitoring, restoration, and education efforts, recommending changes to the CCMP, and tracking and reporting on implementation. The TACs meet on an as-needed basis. Membership is not limited to a specific number of seats, and members are invited by staff to join.

Executive Committee – The EC is the key decision-making body for the Estuary Program. It provides broad policy direction, approves priorities for CCMP implementation, seeks and develops funding sources, and approves CCMP changes, as necessary. Specific responsibilities include: approving funding requests for the Morro Bay Restoration Fund, monitoring and evaluating the performance of the program, approving the annual workplan, and providing leadership and overall direction for the Estuary Program. The EC meets quarterly. Membership includes representatives from specific agencies and interest group seats that are appointed through a majority vote of the EC and serve three-year terms.

Bay Foundation Board of Directors – The Bay Foundation is the nonprofit home of the Estuary Program, and its board of directors approves priorities for CCMP implementation, workplans, Community Projects, and other major components of the work of the Estuary Program. The Board of Directors works collaboratively with the EC on strategic direction and priorities of the Estuary Program.

2. Goals for CCMP Implementation in Fiscal Year 2026

This workplan describes the Estuary Program’s broad goals, specific projects, and planned budget for FY26, which spans from October 1, 2025 to September 30, 2026. This workplan will guide Estuary Program efforts in FY26 and provide a mechanism to measure our success over the coming year. It is important to recognize that the nature of a collaborative, non-regulatory program such as the Estuary Program requires flexibility to be successful; just as some planned projects may be delayed, other unforeseen opportunities and partnerships to further implementation of the CCMP will present themselves. The program goals are summarized below.

Water Quality Protection and Enhancement: Water quality in the Morro Bay watershed and estuary supports diverse habitats and wildlife populations, safe recreation, clean drinking water, and well-balanced economic uses.

One of the main tenets of the NEP is to protect and restore water quality, as the NEP is part of the federal Clean Water Act. This goal illustrates the aspiration for clean water that supports a variety of uses by people and wildlife in Morro Bay.

Ecosystem Restoration and Conservation: The Morro Bay watershed and estuary sustain a resilient community with high habitat connectivity, ample biological integrity, proper ecosystem function, and a vibrant economy.

This goal illustrates the Estuary Program’s interest in conserving and restoring habitats, biodiversity, and ecosystem processes, all of which affect the local economy. The goal also envisions a healthy ecosystem and economy even in the face of change.

Public Education, Outreach, and Stewardship: Community members and visitors around Morro Bay understand basic estuary science and the impacts of specific actions on estuary health and are engaged stewards of the Morro Bay estuary and watershed.

This goal represents the importance of an informed and engaged community for the future health of Morro Bay and a vision that community members will increasingly become stewards of the estuary.

Fostering Collaboration: The community, local government, nonprofits, state and federal agencies, and public and private landowners collaborate and leverage resources to facilitate effective management and increased scientific knowledge of the Morro Bay estuary and watershed.

Another core tenet of the NEP is collaboration, as described in the Clean Water Act. This goal showcases the Estuary Program’s commitment to fostering collaboration to effectively understand and manage the resources of Morro Bay.

Actions to complete these goals are described in detail in Section 4.

3. Budget and Staff Elements

Tables 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 provide an overview of the budget for FY26. The Estuary Program meets a portion of the EPA’s one-to-one match requirement using the Estuary Program-managed Morro Bay Restoration Fund. These funds are private, locally controlled, and already committed and available for these projects. Other sources of match funds include local and state funds, private donations, volunteer time, and contributed services and facilities.

Table 3.1: Budget Overview for FY26

Category	Subcategory	FY26 Anticipated Request	Match	Total
Personnel	Salaries (payroll taxes, workers comp)	\$576,129	\$3,588	\$579,717
	Fringe (health, retirement)	\$73,340	\$0	\$73,340
	Subtotal	\$649,469	\$3,588	\$653,057
Travel	(includes local mileage)	\$16,400	\$0	\$16,400
Equipment	N/A	\$0	\$0	\$0
Supplies	Computers, software	\$7,000	\$0	\$7,000
	Monitoring supplies	\$17,900	\$4,000	\$21,900
	Misc. office supplies	\$11,150	\$0	\$11,150
	Subtotal	\$36,050	\$4,000	\$40,050
Contractual	Audit/Taxes/Accounting	\$25,000	\$5,539	\$30,539
	Education and Outreach	\$23,709	\$244,197	\$267,906
	Monitoring and Research	\$10,800	\$180,430	\$191,230
	Restoration and Protection	\$5,000	\$363,073	\$368,073
	Community Projects	\$0	\$15,000	\$15,000
	Subtotal	\$64,509	\$808,239	\$872,748
Other	Rent	\$55,272	\$13,740	\$69,012
	Utilities	\$4,000	\$0	\$4,000
	Postage	\$250	\$0	\$250
	Copying, Printing	\$2,800	\$0	\$2,800
	Training, Prof. Dev.	\$2,000	\$0	\$2,000
	Telephone, Internet	\$5,500	\$0	\$5,500
	Repairs and Maintenance	\$5,000	\$0	\$5,000
	Insurance	\$4,000	\$0	\$4,000
	Vehicle maintenance, fuel	\$4,750	\$0	\$4,750
	Management Conference Members' Work Time	\$0	\$20,433	\$20,433
	Subtotal	\$83,572	\$34,173	\$117,745
	TOTAL	\$850,000	\$850,000	\$1,700,000

Table 3.2: Budget Detail of Direct Expenses by Program Area

Program Area	Project	FY26 320 Grant Request	Match (non-federal)		Total
			MB Restoration Fund	Other	
Education and Outreach A	Communications 1	\$9,300	\$0	\$104,629	\$113,929
	Education 2	\$3,750	\$0	\$96,468	\$100,218
	Nature Center 3	\$3,000	\$0	\$0	\$3,000
	Comm Engagement 4	\$500	\$0	\$0	\$500
	Mutts for the Bay 5	\$1,000	\$0	\$43,101	\$44,101
	SOTB 6	\$6,159	\$0	\$0	\$6,159
	Subtotal	\$23,709	\$0	\$244,197	\$267,906
Monitoring and Research B	Benthic Invertebrate Monitoring	\$0	\$0	\$9,328	\$9,328
	Eelgrass Monitoring 1	\$0	\$0	\$30,287	\$30,287
	Water Quality Monitoring 2	\$10,800	\$0	\$140,815	\$151,615
	Subtotal	\$10,800	\$0	\$180,430	\$191,230
Habitat Protection and Restoration	Restoration Maintenance and Monitoring	\$0	\$34,500	\$11,106	\$45,606
	Other Restoration	\$5,000	\$0	\$304,830	\$309,830
	Fisheries Management	\$0	\$0	\$12,636	\$12,636
	Conservation & Restoration Proj Dev	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
	Subtotal	\$5,000	\$34,500	\$328,573	\$368,073
	TOTAL	\$39,509	\$34,500	\$753,200	\$827,209

Note: Restoration Fund match provides \$15,000 for Community Projects and \$34,500 for Restoration Maintenance. Expenses shown combined contractual, supplies, and equipment expenses by Program Area to more clearly represent the resources devoted to these aspects of the Estuary Program FY26 workplan. This table does not include Estuary Program staff time or overhead.

Education and Outreach Expenses (section A):

1. Communications expenses include graphic design work and printing for the annual report; design and printing of pamphlets and publications; and ongoing maintenance expenses for our blog and website.
2. Education expenses include supply and materials costs for teacher training, educational curriculum, and other education focused efforts.
3. Nature Center expenses include expenses such as display repairs and upgrades to help maintain the facility.
4. Community Engagement includes support for partner education efforts such as cleanup events and local water conservation efforts.
5. Mutts for the Bay includes management of pet waste bag dispensers, coordination of volunteers, and sharing educational curriculum.
6. State of the Bay expenses include facility reservations, printing, and other costs related to planning and implementing events.

Monitoring and Research Expenses (section B):

1. Eelgrass Monitoring expenses includes imagery collection and analysis to track eelgrass extent in the bay and support for eelgrass health monitoring efforts.
2. Water Quality Monitoring expenses include analytical laboratory services (couriers, sample analysis, and data reporting) and data management support (technical support for maintaining our data management system and submitting data to a state-wide data portal).

Table 3.3: Summary of 320 Spending and Match for FY26

FY26 Workplan Task	320 Budget Other Expenses	320 Budget Staff time	Projected match	Total
REST-1: Habitat Protection	\$0	\$12,132	\$0	\$12,132
REST-2: Restoration Maintenance	\$0	\$14,108	\$45,606	\$59,715
REST-3: Other Restoration	\$5,000	\$44,544	\$304,830	\$354,374
REST-4: Conservation Proj Dev	\$0	\$37,673	\$0	\$37,673
REST-5: Fisheries Management	\$0	\$18,483	\$12,636	\$31,119
MONITORING-1: Coordination	\$26,264	\$39,504	\$179,930	\$245,698
MONITORING-2: Reporting & Analysis	\$0	\$44,387	\$0	\$44,387
MONITORING-3: Data Management	\$0	\$27,390	\$0	\$27,390
MONITORING-4: Quality Assurance	\$1,450	\$32,377	\$0	\$33,827
MONITORING-5: Project Effectiveness	\$986	\$24,556	\$0	\$25,542
MONITORING-6: Eelgrass Monitoring	\$0	\$21,469	\$4,500	\$25,969
MONITORING-7: Partner Research	\$0	\$12,743	\$0	\$12,743
MONITORING-8: SOTB Analysis	\$0	\$27,069	\$0	\$27,069
E&O-1: Communications	\$9,300	\$39,401	\$104,629	\$153,329
E&O-2: Education	\$3,750	\$14,263	\$96,468	\$114,481
E&O-3: Nature Center	\$3,000	\$11,769	\$0	\$14,769
E&O-4: Community Engagement & Stewardship	\$500	\$15,064	\$0	\$15,564
E&O-5: Mutts for the Bay	\$1,000	\$10,359	\$43,101	\$54,460
E&O-6: SOTB events	\$6,159	\$19,833	\$0	\$25,992
PM-1: Manage Committees	\$0	\$12,062	\$20,433	\$32,494
PM-2: Grants & Contracts	\$38,200	\$94,474	\$5,539	\$138,213
PM-3: General Administration	\$104,922	\$49,465	\$17,328	\$171,714
PM-4: Tracking Implementation of CCMP	\$0	\$18,511	\$0	\$18,511
PM-5: Community Projects Program	\$0	\$7,832	\$15,000	\$22,832
TOTAL Budget	\$200,531	\$649,469	\$850,000	\$1,700,000

Program Staffing Anticipated for FY26

All personnel are employees of the Bay Foundation of Morro Bay. As in any small organization, the roles of personnel are fluid to change with the needs of the organization.

- Executive Director: Leads the organization and Management Plan implementation. Responsible for CCMP update. Manages CWA 320 base funding and other grant, staffs committees, and nonprofit board. Oversees general operations – budgeting, accounting, records management, and human resources. Supervises Estuary Program staff. Principal liaison to other agencies and organizations. Principal liaison

to EPA. Serves as the public face of the organization. Represents the Estuary Program on local and regional committees. Oversees CCMP tracking, annual report, and workplan. Attends Association of NEP (ANEP)/EPA meetings.

- Assistant Director: Responsible for assisting the Executive Director with CCMP implementation, managing CWA 320 base funding and other grants, and staffing committees and nonprofit board. Supports budgeting, accounting, records management, and managing NEP staff. Assists with CCMP tracking, annual reports, and workplan. Coordinates project development and grant management across the organization. Manages monitoring program strategy and other special projects, such as State of the Bay. Supports match tracking and National Estuary Program Online Reporting Tool (NEPORT) submission. Attends ANEP/EPA meetings.
- Restoration Program Manager: Develops and implements restoration efforts. Oversees restoration projects, including partner agency coordination, grant management, permitting, and outside services procurement. Manages monitoring and maintenance of restoration projects. Coordinates a diverse set of external experts to assist with technical aspects of specific projects.
- Community Engagement Coordinator: Supports organization-wide communications and community engagement efforts. Responsible for managing the Estuary Program's public-facing communications, including social media, website content, blog posts, newsletters, and press releases. Develops written and visual content that highlights the work of the organization across program areas of restoration, monitoring, and education. Assists with planning and implementing public outreach events and campaigns that promote environmental stewardship and community awareness. Represents the Estuary Program in outreach settings, including relevant local and regional forums.
- Monitoring Projects Manager: Coordinates Estuary Program monitoring efforts. Assists with staff and volunteer management. Manages budgeting, invoicing, contracting, etc. for monitoring projects. Reviews and updates Quality Assurance Project Plan (QAPP), monitoring protocols, and indicators/baseline work. Coordinates data management and submittal of data to the state. Manages and shares data with partners and the general public.
- Monitoring Coordinator: Conducts Estuary Program monitoring efforts. Completes data analysis, reports, and protocols. Assists with volunteer recruitment, training, and fieldwork. Manages quality assurance functions. Manages and shares data with partners and the general public.
- Finance & Operations Administrator: Manages day-to-day bookkeeping and accounting, financial records, annual audit requirements, and provides administrative support for human resources. Responsible for ensuring all operational accounting and financial support is timely, accurate, and consistent with all organization policies and procedures. Coordinates match tracking and supports NEPORT data collection and synthesis.
- Intern(s) and Technician(s) (as needed): Assists with field work, data management, analysis, and outreach. These are part-time, temporary positions.

Fringe Details: \$73,340

- Expenses:
 - Health Insurance – Health insurance costs that the Bay Foundation of Morro Bay covers for eligible full-time employees.
 - IRA Match – Bay Foundation match payments for eligible employees' IRA contributions.
 - Flexible Spending Accounts – A tax-advantaged account to cover eligible health care and dependent care expenses for eligible employees.

Miscellaneous Office Supplies: \$11,150

- Expenses:
 - Office supplies (paper, toner, batteries, etc.)
 - Water delivery
 - Office furniture
 - Meeting space rentals and materials
 - Phone maintenance and repairs
 - Forms, checks, and employee policy posters and guides
 - First aid supplies and CPR training

Monitoring Supplies: \$17,900

- Expenses:
 - Monitoring supplies – Reagent, calibration supplies, small equipment (< \$10,000 each), batteries, and other ancillary items for monitoring in the estuary and creeks. This includes necessary items for health and safety and for quality assurance procedures.
 - Field gear – Protective gear to ensure that staff and volunteers can work effectively and safely.

Compliance with Build America Buy America (BABA) Act Requirements

Congress passed the BABA Act in 2021, concurrently with the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). BABA is a domestic preference program to create long-term opportunities for domestic manufacturers and manufacturing jobs and to build resilient domestic supply chains for a wide range of products used in construction and infrastructure, including iron and steel products, manufactured products, and construction materials. The Estuary Program will work with EPA to determine the types of products that may be covered under this new law and will support compliance where necessary. In FY26, no 320 base funded projects will trigger BABA requirements.

4. New and Ongoing Project Information

Where applicable, the estimated budgets include project and staff costs.

The Estuary Program is fortunate to receive funds from the IIJA that funds projects that support CCMP implementation. Although many direct projects costs such as contracting, analysis, and equipment purchases are funded with IIJA money, Estuary Program staff time to manage these projects are funded with both IIJA and EPA 320 base funding. Thus, IIJA-funded projects are listed in the 320 base funding workplan where appropriate due to time spent by 320-funded staff to support those efforts.

Habitat Protection and Restoration Activities

The Estuary Program's habitat and restoration work advances the goals for Section 320 of the CWA and the PRAE Act by protecting water quality, reducing nonpoint source pollution, and conserving critical coastal and watershed habitats. Through collaborative, locally driven action, these efforts support the long-term health of the Morro Bay estuary and watershed by improving ecosystem function, enhancing natural resource resilience, and maintaining clean water for people and wildlife. This work also aligns with EPA's Pillar 1: Clean Air, Land, and Water for Every American, reinforcing the Program's commitment to protecting environmental resources that benefit both ecological and community well-being.

Guided by the CCMP, the Estuary Program partners with federal, state, local, academic, and nonprofit organizations to implement projects that address habitat degradation, water quality concerns, invasive species, Morro Bay NEP 320 Base Funding Grant

and barriers to native fish recovery. This section outlines current and emerging restoration activities, including land conservation planning, restoration site maintenance, early-stage project development, fish and invasive species management, and support for partner-led initiatives. Together, these efforts reflect the Estuary Program's commitment to science-based restoration, clean water, and stewardship of the Morro Bay watershed.

REST-1: Land Conservation and Planning

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objective: Conserve land as opportunities arise.

Description: The CCMP calls for protection of ecologically valuable habitats in part to help minimize nonpoint sources of pollution entering the estuary and to promote clean water in the bay. Over 5,000 acres of land have been protected through conservation easements and fee title acquisitions by the Estuary Program and partners. In FY26, the Estuary Program expects to work with The Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County (LCSLO) and other partners to develop conservation easements with interested landowners in the watershed. The Estuary Program is participating in community efforts within Morro Bay to support open space preservation around the city. This task represents an anticipated share of staff time to develop these opportunities and support partner efforts.

Partners and Their Roles: LCSLO is experienced in working with landowners to develop easements and acquisitions, obtaining funds for these deals, and overseeing the monitoring and management of the protected lands. Their role is to interface with landowners and the funders to develop easements and acquisitions. Other partners with interest in land conservation in Los Osos and Morro Bay include Morro Bay Open Space Alliance, California Department of Fish & Wildlife (CDFW), California State Coastal Conservancy (SCC), Wildlife Conservation Board, Morro Coast Audubon Society, California State Parks, Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District (CSLRCD), and private landowners.

Output/Deliverables: The deliverable will be a map or similar documentation of acquisitions or easements.

Estimated Milestones: Easement timelines are dependent on landowner and funding timelines.

Estimated Budget: Depends on acquisition and easement opportunities. Staff time: \$12,132. Match: \$0.

Long-Term Outcomes: Achieve land conservation projects as opportunities arise, with a focus on the Los Osos Valley.

CWA Implementation: Addressing diffuse nonpoint sources of pollution. Protecting wetlands. Protecting coastal waters through the National Estuary Program.

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: LP-1 (Protect Special Habitats/Species), LP-3 (Direct Urban Development)

REST-2: Restoration Maintenance and Monitoring

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objective: Conduct maintenance and monitoring for conservation easements and restoration projects, as necessary.

Description: The Estuary Program with its partners has implemented multiple complex restoration projects that require ongoing maintenance. This work includes maintenance of Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve (CCER), riparian fencing, and off-creek water systems as well as best management practice (BMP) projects. At CCER, efforts for 2026 include plant maintenance and additional monitoring and analysis to adapt to changes occurring during high flow events. This task could also include efforts such as trash removal in areas where illegal dumping is impacting sensitive habitats.

Partners and Their Roles: Army National Guard Base Camp San Luis Obispo (Camp SLO), CDFW, California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly), Pacific Gas & Electric, California State Parks, and US Forest Service. Their role is to permit land access and maintain project sites.

Outputs/Deliverables: Activities documented in semi-annual reports.

Estimated Milestones: Work is on an as-needed basis.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$14,108. Match: \$45,606.

Long-term Outcomes: Work with landowners to maintain restoration projects so that they continue to be effective.

CWA Core Program Project Supports: Addressing diffuse, nonpoint sources of pollution. Protecting coastal waters through the National Estuary Program.

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: BMP-1 (Agricultural and Grazing BMPs), BMP-2 (Rural Road Erosion), ECR-1 (In-Stream Habitat), ECR-2 (Riparian Corridors), ECR-3 (Wetland Protection and Enhancement)

REST-3: Other Restoration Efforts

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objective: Engage in other restoration efforts that arise to help achieve CCMP goals.

Description: Additional water quality and habitat restoration opportunities often arise in the course of the year that are worthy of immediate attention. This task reserves some staff time for these opportunities. Some examples include riparian fencing, floodplain restoration, low-tech process-based restoration projects to improve site hydrology and water quality, the San Luis Obispo (SLO) County Integrated Regional Water Management efforts, supporting partner restoration projects on private property, and supporting the city of Morro Bay and stakeholders in habitat management efforts. Staff are working with Cal Poly to enhance floodplain conditions on Walters Creek through low-tech process based restoration practices. The Estuary Program will act as a partner on water conservation, habitat restoration, and steelhead projects as needed. Staff are partnering with University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) and others to conduct invasive plant monitoring and management on the Morro Bay sandspit. Efforts are also underway to work with the partners on synthesizing existing efforts on coastal dune systems on the coast of California to share lessons learned to increase resiliency, develop implementation best practices, and standardize monitoring protocols. Staff conducted a Chorro Creek watershed invasive species survey to inform management of invasives such as giant reed (*Arundo*). Efforts related to obtaining funding and implementing invasive removal will occur in FY26. The Estuary Program will continue to work with partners such as United States Geological Survey (USGS) to conduct monitoring and modeling to understand coastal flooding impacts on estuary habitats and develop projects to address protection of the salt marsh, mudflats, eelgrass, sandspit, and transition zones. Starting in FY24, the work has been funded in part by a Coastal Watersheds Grant from Restore America's Estuaries. The Estuary Program will continue to work with State Parks to conduct invasive sea lavender monitoring and removal and to map invasives and special status species. The Estuary Program continues to work with partners to implement its Habitat Protection and Restoration Strategy (HPRS) which identifies the indicators, environmental stressors, projects, and partners involved in protecting and preserving each habitat type. Additionally, staff continue to support several IJIA restoration projects including a historical ecological study of the bay and buffering habitats, community habitat restoration events, and invasive iceplant management and monitoring on the sandspit.

Partners and Their Roles: Potential partners include SLO County, the city of Morro Bay, the Los Osos Community Services District, CSLRCD, Cal Poly, Camp SLO, the Morro Bay Harbor Advisory Board, CDFW, State Parks, Climate Action Initiative Dune Grant Team (which includes CA Sea Grant, UCSB, Point Blue Conservation Science, US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), USGS, etc.), and others. These are partners in funding, planning, and implementation. Partners for the HPRS are numerous and include the city of Morro Bay, California State Parks, SLO County, local consultants, and local experts.

Output/Deliverables: If the opportunity arises and work is conducted for this item, then a description will be provided in the semi-annual progress reports provided to the EPA Project Officer (semi-annual report).

Estimated Milestones: As opportunities arise.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$44,544. Project costs: \$5,000. Match: \$304,830.

Long-term Outcomes: Restoration efforts support CCMP implementation and partner projects.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Addressing diffuse, nonpoint sources of pollution, protecting wetlands. Protecting coastal waters through the National Estuary Program.

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: Depending on project opportunities that arise, work could impact the following Action Plans: BMP-1 (Agricultural and Grazing BMPs), ECR-1 (In-stream Habitat), ECR-2 (Riparian Corridors), ECR-

3 (Wetlands Protection and Enhancement), ECR-14 (Support Recovery Plans), ECR-15 (Steelhead Barriers and Habitat), ECR-16 (Invasive Species Action Plan), FWR-5 (Water Conservation)

REST-4: Conservation and Restoration Project Development

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objective: To develop project plans and initial scoping for conservation and restoration efforts.

Description: Often planning, permitting, and initial monitoring must be conducted before a project is eligible for funding. This task reserves some staff time to work with partners to conduct these initial efforts. Estuary Program staff will continue to support Camp SLO in stormwater management projects. Efforts may also include engaging landowners in implementing BMPs on private property throughout the watershed. Initial planning is underway with partners to assess fish passage barrier removal projects in the watershed. CSLRCD and San Luis Obispo Council of Governments both received state grant funding for planning projects to address riverine and coastal flooding in the Chorro Flats region and along South Bay Boulevard, respectively. The Estuary Program is involved with project coordination and will participate in technical advisory committee efforts for both projects. Additionally, studies or implementation projects may also be completed (e.g., identify sediment basins, floodplains, migration space) that were identified in the HPRS. Numerous energy related projects are under development in the watershed and near-shore area that could impact Morro Bay and its watershed. Staff will track these potential projects and provide input where appropriate. The Estuary Program will continue to provide support to develop stormwater projects on Camp SLO. Staff will seek opportunities to develop water conservation projects such as groundwater recharge or rainwater catchment efforts. Staff are also in conversation with partners on monitoring of alternative shoreline materials to support improved invertebrate biodiversity. The Estuary Program is also working with the San Francisco Estuary Institute on a historical ecology study of the estuary and lower watershed to better understand conditions and inform restoration practices.

Partners and Their Roles: The primary partners for landowner best management practices are the CSLRCD and the National Resource Conservation Service. Instream flow projects could potentially include Creek Lands Conservation with the role of winning and managing funding and providing technical expertise; the California Conservation Corps (CCC), who would contribute technical expertise, materials and field support; and potential landowners. The primary partners for the steelhead habitat efforts are the city of SLO, and CDFW with the role of providing technical expertise; the CCC who would contribute technical expertise, materials, and field support; and the city of SLO who would provide technical expertise. For conservation planning and invasive species management, primary partners include California State Parks, UCSB, and SLO County, who provide technical expertise and field support. Partners for stormwater projects include Camp SLO, the CSLRCD, and the CCC. Partners on energy-related projects include the city of Morro Bay, SLO County, and the Coastal Commission. These entities take on the role of providing guidance and oversight as these efforts develop. Partners on oyster restoration projects include Sea Grant, Cal Poly, The Nature Conservancy, and Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve as technical resources, and local oyster farms as research partners. Protecting and restoring habitats at Pasadena Point would involve SLO County (as the landowner and implementation partner) and members of the public who have an interest in protecting the area. Camp SLO, as a landowner and funding partner, will be involved in developing stormwater projects on the base. Potential partners for water conservation efforts include Creek Lands Conservation (technical resource) and Camp SLO and Cal Poly as potential partners and landowners.

Output/Deliverables: If this condition arises (need before funding) and work is conducted for this item, then a description will be provided in the semi-annual reports.

Estimated Milestones: Depends on funding deadlines. For conservation and steelhead projects, the milestones are to be determined depending on funding and permitting.

Estimated Budget: Staff: \$37,673. Match: \$0.

Long-term Outcomes: Expand steelhead access to areas in the watershed with the habitat and water quality to support sensitive species. Expand landowner water conservation efforts to protect surface flows. Best management practices to address sediment and water quality concerns. Enhance habitat quality through native

species restoration. Assist in development of sustainable energy projects while protecting environmental resources.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Addressing diffuse, nonpoint sources of pollution.

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: Depending on project opportunities that arise, work could impact the following Action Plans: BMP-1 (Agricultural and Grazing BMPs), ECR-1 (In-stream Habitat), ECR-2 (Riparian Corridors), ECR-3 (Wetlands Protection and Enhancement), ECR-14 (Support Recovery Plans), ECR-15 (Steelhead Barriers and Habitat), ECR-16 (Invasive Species Action Plan), FWR-5 (Water Conservation)

REST-5: Fisheries Management

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objective: To implement projects to benefit native species and other opportunities as they arise.

Description: Steelhead recovery in Chorro Creek is inhibited by invasive Sacramento pikeminnow (*Ptychocheilus grandis*). The Estuary Program conducted pikeminnow management efforts under a CDFW grant from FY21 through FY23. Pikeminnow management work is planned for FY26, funded through IJJA. A steelhead growth and tracking study in Chorro Creek is currently underway, with antennae tracking the movements of tagged steelhead use of Chorro Creek and the estuary. The study is expected to continue into summer FY25 with reporting potentially in early FY26.

Partners and Their Roles: The primary partners for this project will include Stillwater Sciences who hold the permit for implementation. The CCC will provide technical input and field support. CDFW will provide technical support. USFWS offers project oversight and issues the permit for the work. CDFW is a landowner in the watershed and has funded fish-related work in the past.

Output/Deliverables: Summary reports of the results of fish studies will be completed at the conclusion of those efforts.

Estimated Milestones: A better understanding of steelhead use of the mainstem creek helps target projects to improve habitat, water quality, and water quantity.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$18,483. Match: \$12,636.

Long-term Outcomes: Improve fish habitat on lower Chorro Creek to support steelhead recovery.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Protecting coastal waters through the National Estuary Program.

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: ECR-14 (Support Recovery Plans), ECR-15 (Steelhead Barriers and Habitat), ECR-16 (Invasive Species Action Plan)

Environmental Monitoring and Research

The Estuary Program's environmental monitoring and research efforts advance the goals of Section 320 of the CWA and the PRAE Act by supporting science-based decision-making, evaluating project effectiveness, and maintaining long-term data sets that inform watershed restoration and protection. These efforts are foundational to understanding environmental conditions throughout the Morro Bay watershed and estuary, ensuring that implementation actions are grounded in accurate, high-quality information.

Monitoring activities focus on collecting and analyzing key environmental indicators, maintaining rigorous quality assurance standards, supporting partner-led research, and coordinating data management to inform state and regional planning efforts. These tasks are implemented in close coordination with agencies, academic institutions, and local organizations, reflecting the collaborative spirit of EPA's Pillar 3: Permitting Reform, Cooperative Federalism, and Cross-Agency Partnership. By contributing science to regional permitting processes and streamlining information sharing among agencies and landowners, the Estuary Program helps advance well-informed projects that protect environmental resources while supporting sustainable investment and community priorities.

This work also supports Pillar 1: Clean Air, Land, and Water for Every American by strengthening watershed health through data-driven actions that reduce nonpoint source pollution, protect coastal waters, and improve understanding of waterbody status, especially for 303(d) listed waters and total maximum daily load (TMDL) implementation. Program data are used by local governments, shellfish managers, restoration practitioners, and the public to guide planning, improve outcomes, and track progress toward cleaner water and healthier ecosystems.

Work for all environmental monitoring and research tasks is aimed at achieving results for the following outcomes:

1. Project effectiveness evaluations conducted in partnership with relevant agencies and parties are shared broadly.
2. Understanding of TMDL effectiveness and the actions needed to eventually de-list local waterbodies is improved.
3. Overall understanding of waterbody status for 303(d) listed waterbodies in the watershed is improved.
4. Increase understanding of the effectiveness of stormwater management efforts.
5. Understand the impact of implementation actions on long-term, watershed-wide trends.
6. Strengthen collaboration among watershed partners while implementing actions laid out in the CCMP.

MONITORING-1: Monitoring Program Coordination

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objective: Continue coordination of Monitoring Program and collect data that meets Quality Assurance Project Plan guidelines.

Description: The Estuary Program conducts monitoring throughout the watershed and estuary with the goal of tracking changes in ambient conditions and assessing impacts of implementation efforts. This work is supported by a dedicated corps of volunteers, which allow for expanded monitoring efforts. Staff will continue to coordinate the Volunteer Monitoring Program (VMP) to continue ongoing monitoring, track key environmental indicators, and develop new efforts to monitor effectiveness of implementation projects. This task includes monitoring coordination, volunteer recruitment and training, equipment maintenance, and program management tasks. In partnership with the AmeriCorps Watershed Stewards Program (WSP), the Estuary Program serves as a placement site for WSP members. These are individuals at the start of their careers in the environmental field, and staff provide training and mentorship.

Partners and Their Roles: Primary partners in the Estuary Program monitoring effort include the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (CCRWQCB), whose Central Coast Ambient Monitoring Program (CCAMP) lends technical advice, monitoring equipment, and field support. Landowners such as California State Parks, Cal Poly, Camp SLO, SLO County, the city of Morro Bay, and numerous private landowners are also partners, allowing access on their land for monitoring. Cuesta College provides technical support, access to their property, and lab space. Partners on work with WSP members include the CCC, Creek Lands Conservation, the city of SLO, and AmeriCorps. The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) is responsible for water quality in shellfish growing areas, and the programs utilizes Estuary Program data to support their work. Program coordination follows the approved QAPP (a deliverable under Task MONITORING-4) and data is submitted to the California Environmental Data Exchange Network (CEDEN) database (a deliverable under Task MONITORING-3).

Outputs/Deliverables: A summary of work conducted for this item will be provided in the semi-annual report.

Estimated Milestones: As appropriate, monitoring protocols are updated to reflect changes to sites, monitoring methodologies, etc.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$39,504. Project costs: \$26,264. Match: \$179,930.

Long-Term Outcomes: An increase in understanding of the long-term trends in ambient water quality in the watershed and estuary. Identification of potential projects and assessment of existing projects.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Identifying polluted waters and developing plans to restore them (TMDLs). Addressing diffuse, nonpoint sources of pollution. Protecting coastal waters through the National Estuary Program.

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: MON-1 (Support Development of TMDLs), MON-2 (Monitor Environmental Indicators), MON-3 (Monitor Project Effectiveness), MON-4 (Maintain VMP), MON-5 (Support Partners), MON-6 (Support Research Activities)

MONITORING-2: Monitoring Program Reporting and Analysis

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objectives: Analyze data and share results with grantors, partners, local landowners, and the public.

Description: The Estuary Program continuously compiles and analyzes program-generated data to assess long-term trends and project-specific effects on water quality and other indicators of environmental quality. These analyses are shared with program partners, local landowners, and the general public to help inform decision-making. A series of data summary memos will be completed in FY26. This includes an analysis of the sediment impacts to macroinvertebrate populations and overviews of bay and creek health. The task also includes responding to data requests from partners, landowners, and others.

Partners and Their Roles: Primary partners in the reporting and analysis of monitoring data include the CCRWQCB, whose CCAMP lends technical advice to the program. Public and private landowners make use of the data in their own land management and monitoring efforts. Cal Poly also lends technical expertise.

Outputs/Deliverables: When work occurs for this item, a summary will be provided in the semi-annual report.

Estimated Milestones: Monitoring updates for bioassessment, creek health, eelgrass, and bay health are expected in 2026.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$44,387. Match: \$0.

Long-Term Outcomes: Outcomes include making analysis available for agencies, project partners, and others throughout the state to inform and improve their own efforts to protect and restore.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Identifying polluted waters and developing plans to restore them (TMDLs). Addressing diffuse, nonpoint sources of pollution. Protecting coastal waters through the National Estuary Program.

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: MON-1 (Support Development of TMDLs), MON-2 (Monitor Environmental Indicators), MON-3 (Monitor Project Effectiveness), MON-4 (Maintain VMP), MON-5 (Support Partners), MON-6 (Support Research Activities)

MONITORING-3: Monitoring Program Data Management

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objectives: Maintain data in SWAMP-compatible format.

Description: This task includes the on-going maintenance of program-generated data in a state-compatible data format. The Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program (SWAMP) is a State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) program to increase usability and compatibility of water quality data from various sources. Data is quality controlled and entered into a SWAMP-compatible database to increase access for groups, including the general public, throughout the state. Estuary Program data will be submitted to CEDEN for inclusion in the next Integrated Report for the Central Coast Region.

Partners and Their Roles: Primary partners in the Estuary Program monitoring effort include the CCRWQCB, whose CCAMP lends technical advice and data management support to the program. The SWRCB is a partner, providing support for the state's CEDEN data portal.

Outputs/Deliverables: When work is conducted for this item, a summary will be provided in the semi-annual report. Program data available on the [CEDEN website](#).

Estimated Milestones: Input of data into SWAMP-compatible database. Semi-annual submittals of data to the CEDEN and/or SWAMP system.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$27,390. Match: \$0.

Long-term Outcomes: A high-quality dataset available to the public and the state for use in TMDL analysis, 303(d) assessment, land management, etc.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Identifying polluted waters and developing plans to restore them (TMDLs).

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: MON-1 (Support Development of TMDLs), MON-2 (Monitor Environmental Indicators), MON-3 (Monitor Project Effectiveness), MON-4 (Maintain VMP), MON-5 (Support Partners), MON-6 (Support Research Activities)

MONITORING-4: Monitoring Program Quality Assurance

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objective: Maintain an approved Quality Assurance Project Plan and implement necessary quality assurance methods.

Description: The monitoring program maintains a QAPP, approved by EPA, which documents the program's monitoring methodologies, sites, and equipment. This task includes laboratory sample analysis to aid in assessment of quality assurance. In addition, staff time is necessary to keep the QAPP up-to-date and conduct quality control tasks to ensure data quality. The monitoring program collects scientifically rigorous data valued by many of our partners, and the QAPP ensures that the data collection and analysis methods maintain this high level of scientific quality. When data is submitted to CEDEN, the state now requires that an accompanying QAPP be included to document the data quality.

Partners and Their Roles: The EPA Region 9 Office of Quality Assurance is the primary partner, providing oversight of the QAPP and technical assistance. The SWRCB Quality Assurance Officer also provides review and oversight of the QAPP. Other partners include laboratories that analyze Estuary Program samples and partners conducting monitoring in the area such as the CCRWQCB's CCAMP, Central Coast Water Quality Preservation, Inc., the Stream Pollution Trends Monitoring Program, and others.

Output/Deliverables: The deliverable will be an EPA-approved QAPP document.

Estimated Milestones: The updated document is submitted on an annual basis. The timing is dependent upon the EPA approval schedule.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$32,377. Project costs: \$1,450. Match: \$0.

Long-term Outcomes: A high quality data set with data supporting efforts throughout the watershed including 303(d) and TMDL assessment.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Identifying polluted waters and developing plans to restore them (TMDLs).

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: MON-1 (Support Development of TMDLs), MON-2 (Monitor Environmental Indicators), MON-3 (Monitor Project Effectiveness), MON-4 (Maintain VMP), MON-5 (Support Partners), MON-6 (Support Research Activities)

MONITORING-5: Project Effectiveness Monitoring

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objective: Complete monitoring to show project effectiveness for various restoration projects.

Description: Many monitoring efforts to demonstrate effectiveness of restoration or other projects are conducted by program staff (rather than volunteers) due to safety concerns, technical challenges, or a landowner's request. This task encompasses protocol development and monitoring work that falls into this category. This task will include monitoring of restoration projects and monitoring the freshwater seeps in Los Osos. The seeps are expected to demonstrate reduced nitrate contamination of groundwater by septic systems since the Los Osos Water Reclamation Facility came online in 2016. Monitoring data will be compiled to support restoration projects, partner data requests, etc. Staff monitor flows on Pennington Creek to assess the impacts of a project to improve a diversion. Staff partners with CDPH on water quality monitoring to support

management of shellfish growing waters. These activities will continue in FY26.

Partners and Their Roles: Project partners include landowners or responsible entities such as Cal Poly, Camp SLO, and the SLO County Office of Education. Project partners lending expertise and funding include Trout Unlimited, Creek Lands Conservation, Stillwater Sciences, CDPH, local oyster farms, and others.

Output/Deliverables: When work is conducted for this item, a summary will be provided in the semi-annual report.

Estimated Milestones: Monitoring and data reports will be compiled as needed.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$24,556. Project costs: \$986. Match: \$0.

Long-term Outcomes: Conduct monitoring and develop analysis that informs future management and restoration efforts. Conservation easement monitoring is completed annually and landowner communications continue.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Identifying polluted waters and developing plans to restore them (TMDLs).

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: MON-1 (Support Development of TMDLs), MON-2 (Monitor Environmental Indicators), MON-3 (Monitor Project Effectiveness), MON-4 (Maintain VMP), MON-5 (Support Partners), MON-6 (Support Research Activities)

MONITORING-6: Eelgrass Monitoring and Research

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objective: Conduct research and monitoring efforts for eelgrass to determine distribution in the bay as well as bed health.

Description: Seasonal eelgrass monitoring is conducted to aid efforts to protect and restore eelgrass habitat. In FY26, the Estuary Program will continue to monitor according to the robust approach designed to maximize data quality. The effort is engaging experts and agency participants to help inform the monitoring approach and to seek funding to support research and monitoring (see more information under Task MONITORING-7). This task also involves a component of research collaboration with partners to understand eelgrass stressors. Partner efforts include water quality monitoring, analysis related to ocean water quality, and other efforts. In FY26, the Estuary Program will conduct monitoring of eelgrass to track changes in eelgrass acreage, condition, and location over time.

Partners and Their Roles: Project partners include Cal Poly, whose expertise is supporting expanded monitoring and research efforts to study eelgrass, sedimentation, circulation, and water quality. Cuesta College, the local community college, conducts research related to wasting disease and eelgrass health. Other partners include CDFW, a potential funder for the effort. National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), USFWS, and others have provided funding and technical support for the effort. EPA provides both funding and technical support. Secondary partners with an interest in eelgrass in Morro Bay include the SCC, PMEP, the city of Morro Bay, State Parks, local oyster farms, the Black Brant Group, and local businesses.

Output/Deliverables: The deliverables include an eelgrass monitoring report.

Estimated Milestones: Provide a summary in the semi-annual reports when work is conducted for this item.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$21,469. Match: \$4,500.

Long-term Outcomes: To better understand eelgrass dynamics and stressors, thus enabling the Estuary Program to track eelgrass health in the bay.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Protecting coastal waters through the National Estuary Program.

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: MON-1 (Support Development of TMDLs), MON-2 (Monitor Environmental Indicators), MON-3 (Monitor Project Effectiveness), MON-4 (Maintain VMP), MON-5 (Support Partners), MON-6 (Support Research Activities), ECR-7 (Eelgrass Data and Research), ECR-8 (Eelgrass Restoration)

MONITORING-7: Partner Research Efforts

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objective: Support science partners in pursuing research efforts relevant to the goals of the Estuary Program.

Description: The Estuary Program collaborates with partners such as Cal Poly and Cuesta College to facilitate research projects through data sharing, the pursuit of project development, and contributed time. Potential efforts include extreme weather event impact mitigation around the bay, bay water quality, bay sediment characteristics, native oyster restoration, microplastics monitoring, eelgrass wasting disease, phytoplankton, and others. Reports and results will be compiled in the Estuary Program library. Staff support Estuary Marine Protected Area (MPA) monitoring efforts in the bay. Staff participate in the California Estuary Monitoring Workgroup to coordinate and standardize coastal monitoring efforts throughout the state. Estuary Program staff will participate in the effort to share program data and learn from other program's monitoring efforts.

Partners and Their Roles: Cal Poly is a primary partner in these joint efforts. Cal Poly will conduct monitoring of water quality parameters, eelgrass mapping, and analysis. Other research collaboration partners have included Southern California Coastal Water Research Program, USGS, Cuesta College, and others. The Central Coast Wetland Group, who is leading the Estuary MPA monitoring effort, serves as a technical resource.

Output/Deliverables: Deliverables are dependent on partner projects and vary by funding sources. A list will be provided in the semi-annual reports of partner efforts during the reporting period.

Estimated Milestones: Variable, depending on funding sources.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$12,743. Match: \$0.

Long-term Outcomes: Improve understanding of resources in order to better target efforts such as monitoring and restoration.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Protecting coastal waters through the National Estuary Program.

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: MON-1 (Support Development of TMDLs), MON-2 (Monitor Environmental Indicators), MON-3 (Monitor Project Effectiveness), MON-4 (Maintain VMP), MON-5 (Support Partners), MON-6 (Support Research Activities), ECR-7 (Eelgrass Data and Research), ECR-8 (Eelgrass Restoration)

MONITORING-8: State of the Bay Analysis

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objective: Conduct analysis of trends and project effectiveness data for the triennial State of the Bay environmental report card.

Description: Every three years, the Estuary Program creates a State of the Bay (SOTB) report card to share knowledge of the latest science on the status of the estuary and watershed in terms of clean water and healthy habitats. This report provides data and summary information on the state of the estuary and watershed according to a suite of environmental indicators. In FY25, the Estuary Program gathered and reviewed available data, conducted data analysis, and prepared the triennial report card. In FY26, staff will complete the review and develop the final version of the report for printing and distribution. Staff will compile additional content for the online version of the report.

Partners and Their Roles: Project partners include the monitoring partners who share their data and expertise with the Estuary Program. These include CDPH, CCAMP, the Central Coast Water Quality Preservation, Inc., CDFW, Cal Poly, Audubon, CCC, USGS, shellfish farmers, environmental consultants, and community members.

Outputs/Deliverables: The deliverables include a printed report and an electronic version for the web.

Estimated Milestones: Both the electronic and print versions of the report card will be completed by spring 2026.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$27,069. Match: \$0.

Long-term Outcomes: To share the results of monitoring by the Estuary Program and its partners, with the goal of increasing education on nonpoint source pollution, restoration, etc.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Identifying polluted waters and developing plans to restore them (TMDLs). Addressing diffuse, nonpoint sources of pollution. Protecting wetlands. Protecting coastal waters through the National Estuary Program.

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: MON-1 (Support Development of TMDLs), MON-2 (Monitor Environmental Indicators), MON-3 (Monitor Project Effectiveness), MON-4 (Maintain VMP), MON-5 (Support Partners), MON-6 (Support Research Activities), EO-1 (Public Education & Outreach), EO-2 (State of the Bay)

Public Participation, Education and Outreach

Public engagement is a cornerstone of the Estuary Program's mission and a critical component of implementing the CCMP. The Program's education and outreach work advances the goals for Section 320 of the CWA and the PRAE Act by fostering environmental stewardship, raising awareness of nonpoint source pollution, and encouraging behaviors that protect coastal and watershed health. The Estuary Program empowers individuals and communities to play an active role in the long-term protection of the Morro Bay estuary and watershed through accessible communications and programming.

This work supports EPA's Pillar 1 by ensuring that clean water messages and science-based environmental information are shared widely with the public, landowners, and partners. Through both formal education efforts and informal public outreach, the Estuary Program communicates the connection between actions and estuary health, promoting shared responsibility for clean water. These efforts also contribute to Pillar 3 by engaging stakeholders early, improving transparency, and providing shared platforms for environmental education across multiple jurisdictions.

Education and outreach tasks include communications and media, formal education partnerships, maintenance of the Estuary Program's Nature Center, community stewardship events, targeted pollution prevention campaigns such as Mutts for the Bay, and the triennial public engagement events associated with the SOTB report. Together, these efforts create meaningful connections between residents, visitors, and the estuary, ensuring that conservation actions are informed by community values and grounded in locally relevant science.

E&O-1: Communications

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objective: Communicate with a variety of audiences using presentations, printed materials, online presence, social media, and other venues.

Description: The Estuary Program's Education and Outreach program conducts regular communication with a variety of audiences. Several approaches will be employed during FY26 to reach these audiences with meaningful information on the program's efforts. These approaches include the following:

- Website: The Estuary Program website (www.mbnep.org) will be updated with content on a regular basis.
- Blog: The Estuary Program will continue the [Estuary Program blog](#), with regular posts that can be viewed on the website or by subscription. They are also shared via social media.
- Social media: The Estuary Program utilizes Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn extensively. These have proven to be important tools to communicate with the community. Photos and status updates are posted to the Facebook page multiple times a week (<https://www.facebook.com/mbestuary>), and Instagram posts (<https://www.instagram.com/morrobaynep/>) are made at least once per week. Posts are strategic and integrated with the messaging on our website and blog. Messages cover a variety of topics, such as project and fieldwork highlights, volunteer opportunities, community events, presentations given by Estuary Program staff, and other information related to the Estuary Program mission. Currently, the Estuary Program has more than 2,664 Facebook followers, 3,696 Instagram followers, and 470 LinkedIn followers. In FY26, the Estuary Program will continue to increase two-way communication using social media tools.
- Annual report: The annual report summarizes the reach and impact made by the Estuary Program across all programs. The report is created annually and is available online and in limited print.

- **Newsletter:** A quarterly newsletter presents program highlights and promotes upcoming events. This is distributed to email subscribers and posted on the website.
- **News releases:** News releases will be distributed to promote upcoming events or share the program highlights. Key messages will be drafted and incorporated into the news releases. These key messages will be integrated into other communication channels.
- **Events:** Host and participate in events to share science and research results with the public.
- **Brochures and other print materials:** Brochures and other print materials about the Estuary Program, issues related to the health and stewardship of the Morro Bay estuary, volunteer opportunities, and formal educational opportunities will be distributed at the Estuary Nature Center, community events, and presentations in which Estuary Program staff participate. They will also be made available online when possible.

Partners and Their Roles: Partners in Estuary Program communication efforts include the city of Morro Bay, SLO County, the Morro Bay Natural History Museum, California State Parks, the San Luis Obispo Marine Protected Area Collaborative (SLOMPAC), and others. These partners provide resources and expertise, promote Estuary Program events, and share our materials and message with the public.

Output/Deliverables: A summary of work conducted for this item will be included in the semi-annual reports.

Estimated Milestones: The Estuary Program maintains a social media and blog schedule that addresses current events and other topics and is updated in real time.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$39,401. Project costs: \$9,300. Match: \$104,629.

Long-term Outcomes: Residents and visitors better understand their roles as stewards of the Morro Bay estuary. They practice behaviors that help keep our waters clean.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Protecting coastal waters through the National Estuary Programs.

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: EO-1 (Public Education and Outreach), EO-2 (State of the Bay), EO-3 (Nature Center), EO-4 (Formal Education Programs)

E&O-2: Education

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objective: Develop formal education partnerships and services, and continue other education efforts.

Description: In FY26, the Estuary Program will continue working with partners to integrate estuary and watershed-focused activities into existing formal educational programming. The Estuary Program is partnering with Camp Ocean Pines, One Cool Earth, Cal Poly, California State Parks, and other education partners to support expanded field trip and classroom education opportunities. Potential educational activities include watershed model demonstrations in classrooms, hosting estuary and tidepool fieldtrips for student groups, and supporting other watershed education efforts by partners. The Estuary Program will also continue to provide trainings to local docents, online educational resources, and a select number of educational opportunities that are unique to the program (e.g., Mutts for the Bay education efforts). The Estuary Program held a successful round of teacher trainings in FY23 through FY25 and plans to continue the series in FY26. Estuary Program staff will also continue to provide presentations and talks as requested for K-12 students as well as undergraduate and graduate classes. In addition, Estuary Program staff and guest speakers present research and projects that relate to the health of the Morro Bay estuary through public events. The goal of these events is to educate the general public about issues facing the Morro Bay estuary as well as stewardship actions that people can take to help protect it. In FY26, the Estuary Program will host recurring science talk events throughout the year.

Partners and Their Roles: Partners include the Morro Bay Museum of Natural History, a direct collaborator in creating education programs. Camp Ocean Pines brings students to Morro Bay for field trips, and in FY25, the Estuary Program helped fund the purchase of a portable touch tank and watershed model curriculum for use by Camp Ocean Pines naturalists. Teachers, parents, and volunteers from local schools reach out to the Estuary Program for direct support in developing education programs on topics such as watersheds and environmental stewardship. Cal Poly and Cuesta College faculty are partners, bringing classes to the estuary and watershed to conduct research and field trips. Staff visit or present remotely to classrooms from primary through college-level

to share the results of our work. The San Luis Obispo and Monterey MPA Collaboratives are also key partners, helping to produce and distribute estuary and marine-focused stewardship education materials across the state of California.

Outputs/Deliverables: The deliverables will be presentation and field trip statistics. Included in semi-annual reports to EPA.

Estimated Milestones: The statistics on speaking engagements and field trips will be included in the semi-annual reports.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$14,263. Project costs: \$3,750. Match: \$96,468.

Long-term Outcomes: Formal educational partnerships disseminate estuary-related messages to local students.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Addressing diffuse, nonpoint sources of pollution. Protecting coastal waters through the National Estuary Program.

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: EO-1 (Public Education and Outreach), EO-2 (State of the Bay), EO-3 (Nature Center), EO-4 (Formal Education Programs)

E&O-3: Nature Center Maintenance & Operations

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objective: Maintain the content and displays in the Nature Center.

Description: About 25,000 visitors have visited the Estuary Program's Nature Center each year since it was established in 2005, with approximately 5,200 visitors a month during the high season. The center features a watershed mural, a wildlife viewing station with high-powered viewing scopes, a touch-screen educational kiosk, a dynamic watershed model, and a virtual Nature Center kiosk with online content and activities. To keep the center running smoothly requires maintenance and coordination by Estuary Program staff. In FY25, Estuary Program staff updated the Nature Center entrance and continued to replace outdated displays. Staff will continue to host education events in the Nature Center, utilize the space for field trip opportunities, and update the digital poster kiosk with new content on a regular basis. Various upgrades to upkeep the existing exhibits will take place, including replacing faded images, updating maps, and implementing touch-ups to the space. Estuary Program staff will also aim to update two exhibits using IJA funding to include more hands-on, interactive activities.

Partners and Their Roles: The Morro Bay Museum of Natural History will be a partner in this effort, helping direct visitors to the center and lending their expertise. Camp Ocean Pines, One Cool Earth, and other education partners collaborate on curriculum develop and educational opportunities.

Output/Deliverables: A summary description of work conducted for this item will be included in the semi-annual reports.

Estimated Milestones: Maintain operations at the Nature Center.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$11,769. Project costs: \$3,000. Match: \$0.

Long-term Outcomes: The Estuary Nature Center serves as a learning center about the estuary, with updated and engaging exhibits.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Addressing diffuse, nonpoint sources of pollution. Protecting coastal waters through the National Estuary Program.

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: EO-1 (Public Education and Outreach), EO-2 (State of the Bay), EO-3 (Nature Center), EO-4 (Formal Education Programs)

E&O-4: Community Engagement and Stewardship

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objective: Provide community engagement and stewardship opportunities by hosting events and partnering with other environmental organizations to further the Management Plan goals.

Description: The Estuary Program hosts and attends a variety of events to engage with our community. This includes speaking engagements, tabling at events, hosting volunteer events such as cleanups and restoration field days, and supporting community partner projects. Opportunities for projects with partners will be

maximized throughout the year as they arise. Established community engagement events and community partner projects include:

- Speaking engagements: Estuary Program staff present watershed and estuarine information for interested groups throughout the area. Staff also present ongoing projects and results at events and conferences.
- Recurring science talk events: Estuary Program staff and guest speakers present research and projects that relate to the health of the Morro Bay estuary and watershed. The goal of these events is to educate the general public about issues facing the Morro Bay estuary as well as stewardship actions that people can take to help protect it. In FY26, the Estuary Program will host recurring science talk events throughout the year.
- Tabling at community events: Estuary Program staff will host a table/booth at various community events including farmers markets, festivals, Earth Week events, State Parks Campfire Program, ECOSLO's annual Creeks to Coast Cleanup, and other opportunities as they arise.
- Volunteer events: Estuary Program staff and partners will host volunteer events to engage with the community throughout the year. This includes cleanup events and habitat restoration field day events.
- San Luis Obispo Marine Protected Areas Collaborative: The Estuary Program is a key member of the SLOMPAC, which provides education and outreach materials for students and community groups related to the Morro Bay estuary and other MPAs. The group also provides training related to MPAs for local enforcement agencies and provides a collaborative opportunity for community members and enforcement agencies to meet and share concerns related to the health of MPAs. SLOMPAC projects are collaboratively developed and executed. Estuary Program staff participate in collaborative meetings. While in the past the Estuary Program has received and managed grant funding to implement SLOMPAC projects, the organization now has staff able to conduct those tasks. The Estuary Program will continue as a collaborative partner, actively involved in projects between the SLOMPAC and the Monterey MPA Collaborative.
- Sewage pumpout monitoring: The Estuary Program tests the bay's pumpout units three times a year to monitor their efficacy, provides signage for pumpout stations, and facilitates any needed repairs. The program also promotes pumpout use through educational messaging targeted to the boating community to help protect the bay's waters.

Staff will continue to seek opportunities for partnership on water conservation, marine debris, and efforts to protect bay waters.

Partners and Their Roles: Partners include the 28 member organizations of the SLOMPAC, California State Parks through their SeaLife Stewards program, the city of Morro Bay's Harbor Department, the Morro Bay Yacht Club, Bay Foundation of Santa Monica, the Los Osos Community Services District, and local recreational boating business owners. This effort also includes supporting ECOSLO, a local nonprofit organization, in executing annual cleanups within the Morro Bay watershed.

Outputs/Deliverables: Materials completed as projects develop. Activities documented in semi-annual reports.

Estimated Milestones: Projects are conducted as opportunities arise.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$15,064. Project costs: \$500. Match: \$0.

Long-term Outcomes: Coordinate with partner organizations about key messages associated with each community project. Rollout of the messages and education and outreach material will be closely tied to the project implementation.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Addressing diffuse, nonpoint sources of pollution.

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: EO-1 (Public Education and Outreach), EO-2 (State of the Bay), EO-3 (Nature Center), EO-4 (Formal Education Programs)

E&O-5: Mutts for the Bay

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objective: Manage pet waste management program to prevent bacterial contamination in the bay.

Description: The Estuary Program has managed a Mutts for the Bay Program since 2008. The effort involves accepting donations, installing dispensers, coordinating volunteers, and working with partners to install and maintain pet waste bag dispensers throughout the watershed. By using the bags, pet owners prevent bacteria
Morro Bay NEP 320 Base Funding Grant

from reaching the estuary, where shellfish farms and recreational bay users require clean water. In FY26, Estuary Program staff will continue the outreach components of the Mutts for the Bay program. This includes partnering with Woods Humane Society, SLO County Animal Services, and local pet-related businesses/organizations. Estuary Program staff will attend tabling events to share information about environmentally friendly dog ownership, including the Morro Bay farmers market, the Woods Humane Society Fall Festival, and other opportunities as they arise.

Partners and Their Roles: Partners include the City of Morro Bay and SLO County, the two entities responsible for stormwater management efforts in the urban areas surrounding the estuary. A portion of the effort involves public education to share a clean water message and encourage responsible pet owner behavior. A private foundation has awarded the Estuary Program multiple years of funding to support operational and educational costs related to the effort.

Outputs/Deliverables: Program statistics and milestones will be provided in the semi-annual reports.

Estimated Milestones: Program statistics will be ongoing.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$10,359. Project costs: \$1,000. Match: \$43,101.

Long-term Outcomes: Responsible behavior by pet owners reduces bacterial loading to the estuary, protecting beneficial uses such as shellfish farming and recreation.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Addressing diffuse, nonpoint sources of pollution. Protecting wetlands. Protecting coastal waters through the National Estuary Program.

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: EO-1 (Public Education and Outreach), EO-2 (State of the Bay), EO-3 (Nature Center), EO-4 (Formal Education Programs), BMP-6 (Reduce Pet Waste)

E&O-6: STATE OF THE BAY EVENTS

Project Status: *New*

Objective: Implementing triennial State of the Bay events.

Description: Every three years, the Estuary Program hosts a SOTB conference/event series to share knowledge about the status of the estuary and watershed in terms of clean water and healthy habitats. In FY26, the Estuary Program will implement events to share the results of the report card. The Estuary Program will distribute a public-friendly report to share data collected by our program and our partners, and the results will be shared through a series of events to be held throughout the spring of 2026.

Partners and Their Roles: Partners include Morro Bay State Park and other environmental organizations, community engagement, and education partners.

Outputs/Deliverables: Program statistics and milestones will be provided in the semi-annual reports.

Estimated Milestones: A SOTB report will be available in early 2026, and events will be held throughout the spring.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$19,833. Project costs: \$6,159. Match: \$0.

Long-term Outcomes: To share the results of monitoring by the Estuary Program and its partners, with the goal of increasing education on nonpoint source pollution, restoration, etc.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Addressing diffuse, nonpoint sources of pollution. Protecting wetlands. Protecting coastal waters through the National Estuary Program.

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: EO-1 (Public Education and Outreach), EO-2 (State of the Bay)

Program Management

Effective program management is foundational to achieving the goals of the CCMP and ensuring the continued success of the MBNEP as a trusted leader in protecting and restoring the Morro Bay estuary and watershed. Under Section 320 of the CWA and the PRAE Act, the Estuary Program is responsible for implementing locally driven, science-based actions in coordination with a wide range of partners. Strong organizational management ensures that this work is delivered transparently, efficiently, and in alignment with federal, state, and local priorities.

Program management tasks include oversight of committees and partnerships, grants and financial administration, staff and organizational operations, progress tracking, and community-based project support. These functions enable the Estuary Program to manage resources responsibly, meet all grant and reporting requirements, and ensure that implementation of the CCMP remains coordinated, adaptive, and measurable over time.

This work also supports EPA's Pillar 1 by ensuring that the Estuary Program's infrastructure can deliver clean water outcomes through well-managed restoration, education, and monitoring efforts. In addition, it contributes to Pillar 3 by strengthening stakeholder relationships, facilitating transparent oversight, and creating the administrative foundation needed to advance environmental projects efficiently and in collaboration with multiple jurisdictions.

Work for all program management tasks is aimed at achieving results for the following Outcomes:

1. Maintain good standing with the EPA and ANEP.
2. Improve administration and program management to successfully support environmental goals and manage resources in a fiscally responsible manner.
3. Facilitate effective partnerships and stakeholder engagement in implementation of the CCMP.

PM-1: Manage Committees and Build Partnerships

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objective: Hold quarterly committee meetings and support partnerships.

Description: The Estuary Program will continue to coordinate the EC on a quarterly basis. Staff create meeting materials and facilitate the meetings. TACs will be convened as needed to support program areas such as monitoring, restoration, and outreach. Staff will also participate in regional and statewide collaborations that help build partnerships, exchange information, and support effective implementation of the CCMP. These collaborative efforts strengthen coordination across agencies and organizations, improve project development, and ensure that local perspectives inform broader resource management efforts.

Partners and Their Roles: The Management Conference committees are made up of representatives from various governmental, economic, environmental, and educational organizations. The TACs that support monitoring, restoration, and education are made up of local experts who can advise the Estuary Program in these various programmatic areas. The all-volunteer Bay Foundation board is made up of community members with varied backgrounds in science, finance, education, and other relevant areas.

Outputs/Deliverables: Deliverables include EC meeting minutes, agendas, staff reports, and other materials.

Estimated Milestones: These deliverables are produced quarterly.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$12,062. Match: \$20,433.

Long-term Outcomes: Committees provide input and direction for the Estuary Program and ensure that other partnerships are well supported.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Support contribution toward all CWA core programs.

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: This task supports all Action Plans.

PM-2: Grants and Contracts Administration and Financial Management

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objective: Develop workplan, administer grants, and complete annual financial management tasks.

Description: Each year, the Estuary Program evaluates the prior year's progress, anticipates the upcoming year's potential, and develops a workplan and budget. The workplan for FY27 is due to EPA Region 9 in May 2026. Other grants and financial management tasks include reporting and tracking for grants, preparing financial

reports for the Bay Foundation and management committees, and completing year-end financial statements and an annual audit. Estuary Program staff will attend the fall 2025 and spring 2026 NEP/EPA Tech Transfer meetings. Staff will develop projects, administer contracts, and conduct reporting related to the IJIA funding for FY25 and FY26.

Partners and Their Roles: Partners include the Bay Foundation, the board that serves as the bursar for the Estuary Program. EPA is a primary partner, providing oversight and guidance for the program.

Outputs/Deliverables: The deliverables include the 320 base funding workplan and budget (spring 2026), semi-annual EPA grant reports (fall 2025 and spring 2026), an annual/end of year report (fall 2025), IJIA workplan and budget (winter 2025), annual financial statements submitted to the federal clearinghouse (spring 2026), and annual state and federal tax submissions to the State of California and the IRS (spring 2026).

Estimated Milestones: See above.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$94,474. Project costs: \$38,200. Match: \$5,539.

Long-term Outcomes: Grant administration and financial management tasks are completed in a timely and accurate manner.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Support contribution toward all CWA core programs.

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: This task supports all Action Plans.

PM-3: General Administration and Human Resources Management

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objective: Maintain accurate financial and human resource records and manage personnel.

Description: The Estuary Program requires ongoing financial and administrative functions, including recordkeeping and filing, bookkeeping, preparing audited financial statements, maintaining equipment and office space, and interacting with the general public. In addition, the Director spends time managing staff performance and workplan progress. Other human resources tasks include training and professional development, recruitment, managing staff, and keeping all personnel policies and procedures current, such as those related to emergency preparedness for operations. Staff maintains up-to-date bookkeeping records, office space, orderly and properly operating office and field equipment, annual staff performance reviews, and updated policies and procedures. Regular staff meetings will be conducted.

Partners and Their Roles: The primary partner for this task is the Bay Foundation board which sets the policies and procedures for the organization.

Outputs/Deliverables: The Estuary Program provides program management updates in the EPA semi-annual reports.

Estimated Milestones: See above.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$49,465. Operational expenses: \$104,922. Match: \$17,328.

Long-term Outcomes: Policies and procedures must remain up to date so that the organization can function smoothly, allowing staff to focus on attaining the goals of the organization.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Support contribution toward all CWA core programs.

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: This task supports all Action Plans.

PM-4: Tracking Implementation of the Management Plan and Workplan

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objective: Track workplan and CCMP implementation.

Description: The Estuary Program tracks progress on the CCMP Action Plans on a biannual basis. Workplan implementation is tracked with biannual reports on deliverables. Tracking project and program effectiveness is ongoing and includes biannual reports, NEPORT reporting, grant reporting, monitoring, and general project management. Staff will respond to any areas for improvement that are raised during the Program Evaluation process with EPA in FY25.

Partners and Their Roles: The primary partner is the Bay Foundation board who oversees the organization's finances.

Outputs/Deliverables: The deliverables include semi-annual reports to EPA (Fall 2025 and Spring 2026) and NEPORT data (Summer 2025).

Estimated Milestones: See above.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$18,511. Match: \$0.

Long-term Outcomes: Management Plan and workplan tracking occurs to ensure that tasks are completed in a timely and accurate manner.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Support contribution toward all CWA core programs.

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: This task supports all Action Plans.

PM-5: Community Projects Program

Project Status: *Ongoing*

Objective: Provide support for community projects that further the goals of the Management Plan and engage the community.

Description: Community Projects allow community members to be active participants in conservation efforts by helping to implement the Management Plan. The Community Projects Program has a special focus on projects that engage the community. The Estuary Program staff meets with community members to develop projects, prepare contracts, and monitor and evaluate products. The Estuary Program will continue to oversee current projects and develop new projects in FY26.

Partners and Their Roles: Partners for past Community Projects have included the City of Morro Bay Harbor Department, Cal Poly and Cuesta College researchers, California State Parks, SLO County, and the SLOMPAC.

Outputs/Deliverables: The semi-annual report will detail the projects completed in FY25. Final reports from Community Projects.

Estimated Milestones: Project ideas are considered twice a year, dependent on budget, and will be listed in the semi-annual reports.

Estimated Budget: Staff time: \$7,832. Match: \$15,000.

Long-term Outcomes: All projects meet guidelines on community involvement and Management Plan nexus.

CWA Core Programs the Project Supports: Addressing diffuse, nonpoint sources of pollution. Protecting wetlands. Protecting coastal waters through the National Estuary Program.

CCMP Action Plans Addressed: This task can support all Action Plans, depending on the project type and partners involved.

5. Accomplishments

This section reports on major projects that were completed by December 2024. These accomplishments are also included in the semi-annual reports submitted to the EPA in October 2024 and April 2025.

Bay Fish Response to Eelgrass Fluctuations

Project Objective: Monitoring the biotic response to shifts in eelgrass.

Morro Bay's eelgrass beds have experienced many ups and downs in the last 20 years, with a low of 13 acres in 2017 and a high of 750 acres in 2023. The Estuary Program wanted to learn more about how Morro Bay's fish population was shifting in response to these changes in eelgrass.

In the mid-2000s, Dr. John Stephens of Occidental College conducted fish monitoring in Morro Bay at a time when about 340 acres of eelgrass were present. In 2016, when there were only about 13 acres of eelgrass in the

bay, Dr. Jennifer O’Leary of Cal Poly and NOAA Sea Grant repeated Stephens’ work using many of the same monitoring sites and methods. The data showed that fish communities had changed with the significant loss of eelgrass. Habitat generalist species like flatfish became more common, while eelgrass-dependent species like bay pipefish had declined.

The Estuary Program decided to conduct bay fish monitoring using similar methods to see what fish populations looked like during a time of abundant eelgrass. Fish data collection took place in the fall of 2023 and spring of 2024. Various netting and trawling methods were used to capture fish in habitats throughout the bay. The fish were identified, counted, and measured before being returned unharmed to the bay. A total of 8,317 fish from 24 different taxa were collected. Bay pipefish was the most abundant species, accounting for 40% of the total catch, followed by arrow goby at 20%, and shiner perch at 10%.

Eelgrass plays a vital role in maintaining a healthy estuary, providing food and shelter for a diverse range of species. When eelgrass thrives, so do a variety of fish species, especially those that are uniquely adapted to life in seagrass beds. The Estuary Program will continue to map and monitor eelgrass in the bay to support sensitive habitats and aquatic life in Morro Bay’s diverse estuary.

The efforts supported the following CCMP Action Plans: MON-5 (Support Partners), MON-6 (Support Research Activities), ECR-7 (Eelgrass Research), ECR-11 (Conserve Ecosystem Functions), ECR-13 (Population Dynamics)

Habitat Protection & Restoration Strategy Finalized

Project Objective: Create a Habitat Protection & Restoration Strategy to support protection, restoration, research, monitoring, and education efforts around the Morro Bay estuary and watershed habitats.

This past winter, staff finalized the Estuary Program’s [HPRS](#) for the Morro Bay watershed. The HPRS provides a comprehensive, watershed-wide management approach to the health and resilience of the habitats of our watershed. It was developed to guide protection, restoration, research, monitoring, education, and resiliency efforts. It provides measurable objectives and targets to inform future management planning and projects within the Morro Bay watershed, including the Estuary Program’s next CCMP update.

The HPRS describes the health, extent, and key species within five of Morro Bay watershed’s habitat areas: estuarine, freshwater, sandy shores, upland, and urban & agriculture. There are descriptions of different habitat types within each habitat area, such as coastal dunes within sandy shores, or maritime chaparral with upland. These habitat types were based on previous studies like the [Atlas of Sensitive Species of the Morro Bay Area](#) (Sims 2010). The habitat strategy includes mapping analysis based on existing vegetation data of Morro Bay watershed habitats. This will allow tracking of acreage of different habitat types over time as new habitat data becomes available.

The strategy also connects the habitats to the following: the [2022 CCMP](#) Action Plans, [2021 Vulnerability Assessment](#), anthropogenic stressors, management objectives/targets, long-term resiliency, and ongoing, past, and future projects.

The aim is to work with partners to improve the resiliency of the Morro Bay watershed habitats and interconnected coastal communities through the implementation of this strategy.

These efforts support the following CCMP Action Plans: LP-1 (Protect Special Habitats/Species), ECR-1 (Instream Habitat), ECR-3 (Wetland Protection & Enhancement), ECR-9 (Regional and National Collaboration), ECR-11 (Conserve Ecosystem Functions), ECR-12 (Upland Habitats), ECR-14 (Support Recovery Plans), ECR-16 (Invasive Species Action Plan)

Expanding Estuary Education through Community Partnerships

Project Objective: To expand environmental education opportunities related to estuary health, watershed science, and water quality through community partnerships and place-based learning.

In FY24-25, the Estuary Program deepened its investment in environmental education by working with a range of local partners to deliver hands-on programming to youth and families across SLO County. These efforts directly support Section 320 of the CWA and the PRAE, which emphasize public education and community engagement as key strategies for protecting estuarine ecosystems.

Staff led summer programming in partnership with Morro Bay Junior and Little Guards, Creek Lands Conservation, and the SLO County Libraries. Using a watershed model and interactive activities, youth learned about the connection between land use and water quality, with Junior Guards removing 16 pounds of litter from Morro Strand State Beach as part of their stewardship efforts. Creek Lands Conservation campers explored the estuary by kayak and joined staff on a nature journaling hike up Black Hill. At libraries across the county, Estuary Program staff led storytime events on marine life, estuaries, and science careers, followed by themed crafts that introduced young children to coastal ecology.

The Estuary Program also provided funding and support to expand the reach of two regional education programs. At Monarch Grove Elementary School in Los Osos, the Estuary Program partnered with One Cool Earth (OCE) to deliver a full year of garden-based environmental lessons focused on estuary and watershed health. The Estuary Program also supported “Watershed Week” across 32 One Cool Earth partner schools, where students explored the structure of wetlands, the movement of pollutants to the coast, and the role of the Morro Bay estuary.

At Camp Ocean Pines, Estuary Program funding supported the development of a new touch tank and a portable version that brings estuarine species and tidepool ecology to schools and events throughout the county. The project also supported the creation of watershed-focused curriculum and a student water quality lab, now included in the camp’s environmental science programming.

Through these collaborations, the Estuary Program reached hundreds of students and families with science-based, place-based education that fosters a deeper understanding of local natural resources. These efforts contribute to the long-term goals of the program’s CCMP and reflect commitment to build environmental literacy and stewardship across the watershed.

These efforts support the following CCMP Action Plans: EO-1 (Public Education and Outreach), EO-4 (Formal Education Programs)

Community Projects

Project Objective: Provide support to Community Projects that address the goals of the Estuary Program.

The Estuary Program’s Community Projects Program involves staff working closely with partners to develop projects that directly address our goals and support our Action Plans. The total annual Community Project budget for FY26 is \$15,000.

The OCE school garden project was completed in summer 2024 with FY24 funding. OCE is a local nonprofit that conducts outdoor education lessons to expand student knowledge on watersheds, conservation, and stewardship. The Community Project funding provided 18 lessons each for the 300 students at Baywood Elementary School in Los Osos. Surveys of student knowledge at the start and end of the school year

documented an increase in environmental curriculum knowledge. The program was such a success that the Baywood Elementary community has secured funding to support the program for two additional years.

For 2025, staff worked with State Parks to develop a project that supports environmental education throughout the SLO Coast District. SLOMPAC developed an activity guide aimed at youth to provide education MPAs, wildlife, ocean safety, marine stewardship, and tribal cultural knowledge. The project initially allowed for printing of the activity guide to distribute at MPAs throughout California. State Parks was seeking funding to reprint the guide for distribution throughout the district to Junior Rangers, campfire programs, school groups, visitors to the museums and parks, and at special events. The project funded printing of nearly 24,000 guides, and State Parks began distributing them in the fall of 2024. They expect to complete distribution by the end of the Community Project in fall 2025.

All projects help implement the CCMP Action Plans with an emphasis on engaging the community in the project. Funds used to support Community Projects come from the Morro Bay Restoration Fund, a match source to the EPA 320 base funding.

6. Recurring Extreme Weather Event Risk(s) Considered

The development of the workplan was consistent with the CCMP, Vulnerability Assessment, HPRS, and other planning and management documents developed by the Estuary Program and approved by the Management Conference.

7. Travel Expenses

The following table contains the travel expenses charged to 320 base funds in the first half of FY25.

Event	Destination	Trip Purpose	Dates	Staff Attended	Costs Included	Total Amount
ANEP Spring Meeting	Washington, DC	Technical transfer with NEPs, EPA	3-23-2025 to 3-28-2025	Melodie Grubbs	Meals	\$322

The following table contains the travel expenses projected to be charged to 320 base funds in the second half of FY25.

Event	Location	Trip Purpose	Dates	Staff Attending	Costs Included	Estimated Amount
California Red-Legged Frog Training	Petaluma, CA	Education on conducting work in areas where CRLF are present	7-21-2025 to 7-23-2025	Makenzie O'Connor	Registration, mileage, lodging, meals	\$1,000
ANEP meeting	Mobile Bay, AL	Technical transfer	11-11-2025 to 11-13-2025	Melodie Grubbs	Airfare, hotel	\$3,000

8. Acronym List

The following terms and acronyms are used in this workplan:

Acronym	Explanation
ANEP	Association of National Estuary Programs
BABA	Build America Buy America
BMP	Best management practice
Cal Poly	California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo
Camp SLO	Army National Guard Base Camp San Luis Obispo
CCAMP	Central Coast Ambient Monitoring Program
CCC	California Conservation Corps
CCER	Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve
CCMP	Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan
CCRWQCB	Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
CDFW	California Department of Fish and Wildlife
CDPH	California Department of Public Health
CEDEN	California Environmental Data Exchange Network
CSLRCD	Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District
CWA	Clean Water Act, the enabling legislation for the National Estuary Program
EC	Executive Committee
EPA	Environmental Protection Agency
Estuary Program	Morro Bay National Estuary Program
FY	Fiscal Year
HPRS	Habitat Protection & Restoration Strategy
IIJA	Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act
LCSLO	The Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo County
LOCSD	Los Osos Community Services District
MPA	Marine Protected Area
NEP	National Estuary Program
NEPORT	National Estuary Program Online Report Tool
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
OCE	One Cool Earth
PRAE	Protect & Restore America's Estuaries
QAPP	Quality Assurance Project Plan
SCC	State Coastal Conservancy
SLO	San Luis Obispo
SLOMPAC	San Luis Obispo Marine Protected Area Collaborative
SOTB	State of the Bay
SWAMP	Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program
SWRCB	State Water Resources Control Board
TAC	Technical Advisory Committees
TMDL	Total Maximum Daily Loads
UCSB	University of California, Santa Barbara
USFWS	United States Fish & Wildlife Service
USGS	United States Geological Survey
VMP	Volunteer Monitoring Program
WSP	AmeriCorps Watershed Stewards Program

The Bay Foundation of Morro Bay dba the Morro Bay National Estuary Program does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, disability, age, or sex in administration of its programs or activities, and, the Bay Foundation of Morro Bay does not intimidate or retaliate against any individual or group because they have exercised their rights to participate in actions protected, or oppose action prohibited, by 40 C.F.R. Parts 5 and 7, or for the purpose of interfering with such rights.