



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

**May 21, 2025
4:00 pm**

Minutes

Attendees: Jason Curtis, *Bay Foundation*; Phil Hammer, *Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board*; Becka Kelly, *Morro Bay Harbor Department*; John Flaherty, *Recreation/Tourism seat*; Vivian Lopez, *USEPA*; Kate Ballantyne, *SLO County Public Works*; Dr. Emily Bockmon, *Cal Poly University*; Ethan Bell, *Fisheries Ecologist, Stillwater Sciences*; Blake Fixler, *Administrative Assistant to County Supervisor*; Marshall Ochylski, *CSD Vice President of the Board*; Ann Kitajima, *MBNEP Staff*; Melodie Grubbs, *MBNEP Staff*; Jodi Marfia, *MBNEP Staff*

1. Introductions and Updates

- Jason Curtis: Representing the Bay Foundation. No specific updates to share.
- Ethan Bell: Stillwater Sciences – Environmental Seat. Ongoing collaboration with Estuary Program, Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District, and Army Corps on steelhead research in Morro Bay and Chorro Creek, focusing on tracking juvenile migration using acoustic tags and 33 receivers across the bay. Identification of critical feeding areas for juvenile steelhead in the ecotone where fresh water meets salt water. Current monitoring data show essential habitat use; with data collection began in late February/early March and receivers will likely be out until mid-June.
- Marshall O: Representing Los Osos Community Services District (LOCSD). No updates.
- Zara Landrum: Morro Bay City Council. No updates.
- Kate Ballantyne: County Public Works. No updates.
- John Flaherty: Tourism & Recreation Chair. No updates.
- Becka Kelly: Representing Morro Bay Harbor Department. Dredging underway in Morro Bay entrance; funding secured for additional dredging near channel markers 17/18 in winter. Morro Bay City exploring beneficial reuse options for dredged material. Salmon fishing is being allowed June 7-8 only.
- Emily Bockman: Representing the Science/Research Seat. Cal Poly is discussing future monitoring efforts in light of uncertain federal support; private foundation involvement remains strong.
- Phil Hammer: Representing the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board. For the upcoming State Park Marine dredging, talking about options for the dredge spoils. The Santa Barbara County Flood Control District faces a similar challenge, and they are working to place them on the Carpinteria salt marsh as a pilot study. This might be expanded to other areas including State Park Marina, in particular because that dredge happens so infrequently.
- Blake Fixler: Legislative Assistant to County Supervisor Bruce Gibson. No updates other than they are working on their budget.
- Vivian Lopez: Representing the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Uncertainty in funding and everything is a moving target. She is keeping Mel updated on information. Our next step is funding for the base funding workplan.
- Melodie Grubbs: Updates to come later in meeting.
- Ann Kitajima: Updates to come later in meeting.
- Jodi Marfia: No updates.

2. Public Comment

None.

3. Agenda Revisions

None.

4. **ACTION:** Approval of meeting minutes from February 19, 2025 Executive Committee (EC) meeting (see attached)

Vote: Kate motioned to approve the minutes as presented. John seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

5. **ACTION:** Consider approval of EC bylaw updates

Approval of minor updates to bylaws, clarifying virtual attendance options and modifying e-vote procedures to reflect immediate ratification.

Vote: Marshall made the motion to approve the bylaw updates. Ethan seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

6. **ACTION:** Consider approval of 320 base funding workplan for Fiscal Year (FY) 2026

Staff described the uncertainty around the funding award amount for FY26 and noted that revisions might be needed as they were for the FY25 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) workplan.

Vote: Becca made the motion to approve the 320 base funding workplan. Zara seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

7. **ACTION:** Consider approval of Consent Decree request for Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve (CCER) maintenance in FY25

Staff discussed the needed support for CCER maintenance for the remainder of FY25. Ethan pointed out the value of the California Conservation Corps in these types of projects and noted that a strength of the Estuary Program is the ability to support on-going maintenance rather than just finishing a project and walking away. Jason asked if the amount of funding requested would be adequate for the remainder of FY25, given that it's nearly as much as the requested amount for all of FY26. Staff clarified that most of the work for FY25 has yet to take place, so the requested amount should be adequate.

Vote: Becca made the motion to approve the Consent Decree request for CCER maintenance in FY25. Emily seconded. All in favor. None opposed

8. **DISCUSSION:** Update to FY25 IIJA workplan

Mel provided the history behind the needed updates to the FY25 IIJA workplan. It was approved last year in November by the EC and Bay Foundation and submitted to EPA in December. Based on guidance from EPA, two tasks were consolidated, the timeline was adjusted, and a project was removed since other funding became available. The changes were significant enough that we felt they should be presented to the EC.

9. **DISCUSSION:** Consent Decree spending for Harbor Department pumpout project

The e-vote for \$8,400 to support the Tidelands Park dock repair was unanimously approved by all EC members with recusals by city staff. The funding ensures that pump-out facilities, which are crucial for water quality protection, can be installed. Becca thanked the group for their support for the project and provided the update that the dock repair was complete and the pumpout installation was nearly finished. Jason asked about proper documentation of

the e-vote, and staff responded that they would include a summary of the vote, including the appropriate recusals, as part of the meeting minutes.

10. **DISCUSSION:** Program Evaluation (PE) update

The Estuary Program's five-year PE is in progress. Staff developed comprehensive report and submitted to EPA in mid-April, and the site visit is scheduled for July 9-10. This will include field tours and a stakeholder and partner event on July 10 to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the program. At the event, Dawn Addis will give a proclamation from the State celebrating the program's 30 years.

Vivian gave an update on feedback on areas for improvement from past PEs and making sure we address them in the upcoming visit.

11. **DISCUSSION:** Semi-annual reports for 320 base and IJA funding

Semiannual financial reports show 73% of 320 base funding and just over 50% of IJA funds expended, with match for the 320 grant at 182% (approx. \$5.7M leveraged).

12. **DISCUSSION:** Program Highlights

Staff presented highlights for the program areas.

Administration Updates: Please help spread the word if you know of any good candidates for our Community Outreach Coordinator position.

Monitoring Updates: Jason inquired about the status of Watershed Stewards Program members for supporting bioassessment next year, as their federal funding may go away. Staff reported that there's been talk that the program will continue with state funding, likely with a slightly different program structure.

Restoration Updates: The committee discussed the herbicide practices utilized on the invasive iceplant removal work on sandspit which is in its third year using both chemical and manual methods and monitoring for effectiveness and natural re-vegetation. The group discussed the use of glyphosate (Roundup) for invasive control on city property, with debate on bans and the need for pragmatic approaches to restoration and regulatory compliance. Staff laid out the methods, controls, oversight, and regulatory approvals required for the project. Consider follow-up discussions on the topic.

Communications, Outreach & Education Updates: Staff recently completed year three of teacher training workshops, supporting K-12 and informal educators in a partnership with Cal Poly, Creek Lands, and State Parks. Plans are underway to integrate environmental education with local summer programs (e.g., Little Guards) as staff found last year's collaboration to be impactful.

13. Adjourned at 5:04 p.m. to the next meeting of August 20, 2025 at 4:00 p.m., to be held via Zoom and in the Morro Bay offices.

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