



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

August 20, 2025  
4:00 pm

### Staff Report

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1. Introductions and Updates
2. Public Comment
3. Agenda Revisions
4. **ACTION:** Consider approval of May 21, 2025 Executive Committee (EC) minutes (see attached)
5. **ACTION:** Consider approval of Consent Decree request for Cuesta Inlet property acquisition

Save Cuesta Inlet, a newly formed community nonprofit, is leading a grassroots effort to acquire and permanently protect the Cuesta Inlet property for public access, recreation, and long-term habitat conservation. The group has negotiated a purchase price of \$735,000 and is working to close escrow by November 2025. As of the last update, they have raised approximately \$500,000 with an additional donor matching pledge of up to \$100,000.

At their August meeting, the Bay Foundation Board expressed support for this effort and approved \$60,000 from the Consent Decree fund toward the acquisition. This expenditure aligns with the FY2023 to FY2027 Restoration Spending Plan, approved by the Bay Foundation and EC in November 2022. The plan set aside \$150,000 for supporting land conservation efforts.

Staff recommend EC approval of \$60,000 from the Consent Decree fund to support Save Cuesta Inlet's acquisition of the property.

6. **DISCUSSION:** Fiscal Year 2026 Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act workplan discussion (see attached)

The Estuary Program is beginning the process of creating a budget and workplan for the upcoming Fiscal Year (FY) for the Infrastructure Investment & Jobs Act (IIJA) funding. We are expecting \$910,000 in IIJA funding for FY2026, which will be the final year of this funding source. These funds do not have a match requirement. Note, while the National Estuary Programs (NEPs) recognize that this last year of funding may be at risk for potential clawback, we have not heard officially that this funding will not be available and thus are proceeding with workplan and budget development.

Our approach to kick off this process is to present to EC the approved FY2025 IIJA workplan tasks and include any new tasks under consideration (denoted with an asterisk). These new tasks are being identified through partner communication, conservation planning, and ongoing efforts to secure complementary project grant funding. This discussion is an opportunity for EC members to provide input on project areas that may be missing from the draft list.

In the final year of IJJA funding, continued staff support will remain a priority, ensuring we have the capacity to manage ongoing projects and meet program objectives. Wrapping up existing multi-year project efforts will also be a focus, along with targeted investments in new opportunities that align with program priorities and the grant timeline. One such opportunity under consideration is support for a shovel-ready project with the County of San Luis Obispo to install a canopy for a fueling station to prevent stormwater runoff pollution making its way into nearby Chorro Creek. We are also proposing to include support for the Comprehensive Conservation & Management Plan (CCMP) update to ensure that we have the capacity to effectively coordinate, engage stakeholders, and incorporate priorities.

#### Workplan Task Categories for IJJA FY26:

- Capacity Building
  - Personnel (including travel and professional development)
  - CCMP Update Support\*
- Monitoring
  - Tracking Bay Health
  - Tracking Creek Health
  - Eelgrass Monitoring & Research
  - Data Analysis & Management
- Restoration
  - Invasive Species Management
  - Habitat Restoration & Coastal Resilience Planning
  - Fish Habitat Monitoring & Improvement
  - Open Space Habitat & Access
  - Implement BMPs in Watershed
- Water Infrastructure
  - Stormwater Improvement
  - Groundwater Monitoring
  - County Fuel Canopy Installation Project\*
- Education & Outreach
  - Communications
  - Environmental Education
  - Nature Center Updates
  - Community Engagement and Stewardship

#### 7. DISCUSSION: Program Evaluation update

We recently completed a successful Program Evaluation (PE) site visit with our EPA partners, during which we visited both bay and watershed sites. The visit provided an opportunity to interface with partners and discuss a wide variety of ongoing projects in the areas of restoration, monitoring, and education & outreach. EPA is now in the final step of the PE process, which involves preparing and drafting their official evaluation letter. We anticipate that one key area of focus in their letter will be the need for the Estuary Program to increase funding from state and non-federal sources given the changes in federal funding availability. Additionally, we expect that the EPA will likely mention our upcoming CCMP update to be conducted in 2027.

#### 8. DISCUSSION: Program Highlights

Administration Updates:

- Staff are recruiting and hiring a full-time Monitoring Coordinator position beginning in September
- Our new Communications Coordinator started last month.
- The NEPs have been included for full federal funding for FY2026, and both the House and Senate have recently voted to approve this budget. Additionally, the reauthorization process for NEPs is moving through the necessary steps, led by the Association of National Estuary Programs (ANEP) and ESP Advisors, the lobbying group that supports ANEP. For NEPs the full base funding amount for FY2026 remains at \$850,000, which is the amount we received in FY2025 and what we planned for in workplan and budget we developed for FY2026. This is a significant win for the NEPs, and overall, the funding outlook is positive.

#### Monitoring Updates:

- Summer macroalgae monitoring: Staff have been out on the bay this month, monitoring macroalgae growth at six bay sites. We launched the work two years ago to better understand the macroalgae/eelgrass interaction. Algae is typically more efficient at nutrient uptake than eelgrass, and under certain conditions it can crowd out eelgrass. Our observations indicated an increase in macroalgae in the bay at the same time that eelgrass was making a comeback. Our results show more algae in the summer versus the winter, and that eelgrass density plays a role in macroalgae presence. In areas with increased eelgrass density, macroalgae biomass increased. It appears that the algae gets tangled in the eelgrass blades and is held in place as the tides inundate and then recede from an area. We have not yet noticed any negative impacts to eelgrass from the algae but we'll continue to monitor to track impacts over longer time scales. For more details, see our recent [blog post](#).
- SOTB: Every three years, we compile monitoring and research results for the estuary and watershed for our State of the Bay report card. Staff have been working diligently since the beginning of the year to review our data and that of our partners. Some exciting new datasets for the report include analysis of changing bay elevation with eelgrass decline and recovery; shifts in bay fish species composition following eelgrass decline and recovery; and the impacts of extreme weather events like the winter 2023 storms. The report will be released early in 2026.

#### Community Projects Updates:

- The 2025 State Parks project *Support of MPA Curriculum Through Printing and Distribution of the Discover MPAs Activity Guide* is wrapping up. We printed and delivered 23,750 copies of the activity guide in September of last year. Through the end of June, 75% of the copies had been distributed at parks, campgrounds, museums, special programs, and community activities.
- Potential projects for 2026 are currently under development with various partners.

#### Restoration Updates:

- Sea Level Rise & Adaptation Planning: We continue our partnership with the United States Geological Survey (USGS) on planning for sea level rise and adaptation measures. USGS is incorporating additional watershed flow and sediment data into the model. The second technical advisory committee (TAC) meeting will be held in early September to discuss management scenarios.
- Adobe Road Fish Passage Feasibility Study: The feasibility study was completed in June. Our grant proposal to the California Department of Fish & Wildlife Fish Restoration Grant Program for evaluating existing fish passage barriers in the watershed is under review until December 2025.
- Walters Creek Floodplain Enhancement: We are awaiting a permit from the Coastal Commission and then will proceed with implementation (hoping for September or November 2025). We are working with partners such as Creek Lands Conservation and Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District (CSLRCD) to apply for funding for low-tech process-based restoration projects at the County scale. The Wildlife Conservation

Board Prop 4 proposal passed the preliminary review and a full application will be submitted with partners in August 2025.

- Historical Ecology Study: We held a successful meeting with ytt representatives in June 2025. A draft report, including habitat mapping, will be completed by September 2025.
- Invasive Ice Plant Removal: Effectiveness monitoring of the project occurred in April with an annual report submitted to Coastal Commission in June 2025. We have scheduled the California Conservation Corps for additional hand removal efforts in early fall.
- Chorro Creek Invasive Species Mapping: We are developing a contract with SLO County to begin treatment at 20 locations of *Arundo spp.* as the first step in addressing invasives in the area.
- Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve: We are exploring adaptive management options for the site and plan to hold a TAC meeting to discuss next steps.
- Regional Dune Workshop: We are collaborating with UC Santa Barbara on a state-wide study to look at dune habitat function and vulnerability. Morro Bay is a case site. This project will be wrapping up this fall.
- Steelhead Growth and Tracking: A final report has been completed by Stillwater Sciences to summarize the results of this study. A blog coming out later this summer will highlight the results.
- Cal Poly Road Crossing Improvement: We will be hiring Pacific Watershed Associates to design an improved crossing along a tributary to Walters Creek this fall.

#### Communications, Outreach, & Education Updates:

- Eelgrass Sign & Exhibit in Nature Center: With US Fish & Wildlife support, we have designed and printed an interpretive sign for the overlook pier adjacent to Estuary Program office. We also are in contract for designs of a hands-on children's eelgrass exhibit in the Nature Center.
- Held several events in July including a July 5 community clean-up event, guest presentation and kayak event with the local Sierra Club chapter, staff presentation and field trips with the Morro Bay Jr Guards and Chumash Summer Camp, and Fish Printing Art event with the Morro Bay Art Center.
- Currently planning for a Fall Science Explorations and Volunteer Appreciation event. Please check out our event calendar for upcoming events: <https://www.mbnep.org/events/>.
- A media group, Project Earth, donated their time to produce video and photo content for us. They attended our Earth Month clean-up event in April and recently sent us their video titled "Estuaries." Available to watch [here](#).

9. Adjourn to next meeting of November 19, 2025 at 4 p.m., which will be hybrid with some attendees participating via Zoom and others meeting in the Estuary Program office.

#### Attachments:

- Minutes from May 21, 2025 EC meeting
- FY2025 IJA Workplan (for reference)

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