

SUMMER 2025

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FEATURED



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MORRO BAY**



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CORNER**



MORRO BAY
NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

COMMUNITY, CARE & THE COAST WE SHARE

Summer arrives in Morro Bay with a noticeable shift. Birds chirp earlier, morning fog drifts in over the bay, and the trailheads are busy with hikers. Evenings bring bonfires, golden sunsets, and the scent of salt in the air. It's a season that invites us to slow down, step outside, and connect – with each other, and with the place we call home.

This time of year brings a natural sense of energy and momentum. People are out exploring the bay, visiting local shops, hiking the dunes, and spending time with friends and family. These moments, though small, remind us that the health of this place is shaped by what each of us contributes. I often think of these as small deposits, everyday acts of care and stewardship that over time build something lasting.

This summer, we are celebrating 30 years as a National Estuary Program. That milestone reflects not just the passage of time but a collective effort. Our progress has come from many hands – staff, board members, volunteers, partner organizations, and community

members – each contributing small deposits of time, talent, and heart.

Morro Bay is a place of extraordinary beauty, where coastal wetlands, eelgrass beds, creeks, and open water come together to support a rich diversity of life. It is a place where you can watch sea otters float among the kelp, birds nest in protected habitats, and kids learn about nature just steps from the shore. But this beauty is not something we can take for granted. It reflects years of care and hard work, and it will take strong stewardship to ensure that future generations can experience and enjoy it as we do today.

So this summer, pause and take a moment to enjoy what this place offers. Notice the changing landscape. Feel the warmth of the sun. And if you can, make a few deposits. Pick up trash on the beach. Scoop that dog poop. Watch the birds from a respectful distance.

Because every small action adds up – and this place is worth it.

-Melodie Grubbs, Executive Director



ADAPTING TO RISING WATERS: EFFORTS TO REDUCE FLOOD RISKS IN MORRO BAY

Our coastal communities are still feeling the impacts of the January 2023 storms when heavy rains and high tides caused flooding along the bay shoreline and lower Chorro Creek. As sea levels continue to rise and powerful storms become more common, these low-lying areas are expected to face more frequent flooding. Two local partners are working to identify at-risk areas and explore potential solutions.

The [San Luis Obispo Council of Governments](#) (SLOCOG) launched a project in spring 2024 to improve car and bicycle transportation and public access between Morro Bay and Los Osos while protecting the natural habitats. The project began with an inventory of transportation infrastructure, recreational opportunities, and sensitive habitats at risk from flooding. They developed a hydrodynamic model to simulate water movement in the bay for different sea level rise scenarios. Their results will be shared later this summer.



The SLOCOG project determined that portions of South Bay Boulevard and State Park Road near Windy Cove could face daily tidal flooding by 2060 under high sea level rise projections. Pictured above is the parking area next to State Park Road during an extreme high tide, which gives us an idea of possible impacts from rising seas. Visit the project's website for more details.

The January 2023 storms also heavily impacted homes, fields, and roads along lower Chorro and San Bernardo Creeks. The [Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District](#) (CSLRCD) owns Chorro Flats, the floodplain in lower Chorro Creek, pictured below from Cerro Cabrillo.



While Chorro Flats has supported floodplain functions such as sediment capture for over 25 years, it is now at or close to capacity. The CSLRCD has launched a project to assess conditions and develop actions to reduce flooding and protect habitat.

Possible solutions include land acquisition, floodplain restoration, and land use best management practices. The project uses hydrodynamic modeling to assess current and future flood conditions and potential adaptations. The project is expected to finish this winter, and next the CSLRCD anticipates seeking funding to implement the identified solutions.

The Estuary Program is excited to be a part of these efforts to protect crucial infrastructure while safeguarding vulnerable habitats throughout the Morro Bay watershed.



EDUCATION AND OUTREACH: SUMMER HIGHLIGHTS

Our Education & Outreach staff have been busy this summer with field trips, summer camps, and other community events. Although we don't usually host field trips over summer break, this year we have had two. The first was a field trip for a local homeschool group. Led by a State Parks interpretive ranger, students explored the native plant communities on a trail near Black Hill. We will also be hosting the SLO Classical Academy, with the field trip starting out at the Estuary Program Nature Center to learn about keeping watersheds healthy, and ending with an exploration of the tidepools at North Point Natural Area.

Our education team has also been providing programming to several local summer camps, including the Morro Bay Junior Guards, Creek Lands Conservation CC YES program, and the Chumash Heritage & Marine Science Camp. At each of these camps, Estuary Program staff taught campers about the estuary, watersheds, pollution, local ecology, and more.



A camper at the CC YES summer camp enjoys the view of Morro Rock from the top of Black Hill.



An ochre sea star observed in the Estero Bluffs tidepools during a Snapshot Cal Coast event.

Beyond these youth and education programs, we hosted two annual summer events. At this year's July 5th cleanup, 41 volunteers picked up 63 lbs of trash from the Morro Bay Embarcadero following the busy Fourth of July holiday. These cleanups help to keep our bay clean and healthy for people and wildlife.

[Snapshot Cal Coast](#) is an annual community science event hosted by the California Academy of Sciences. During the month of June, participants are encouraged to make observations of plants, animals, and seaweeds along the California coast using the iNaturalist app. Estuary Program staff worked with Morro Bay State Parks staff to host an event at Estero Bluffs State Park, where community members joined us in making observations at this site. Throughout California, over 6,400 people made nearly 85,000 observations for Snapshot Cal Coast!



Mutts for the Bay Corner

Being an eco-friendly dog owner involves more than just picking up your dog's poop. For example, did you know that pet care products such as shampoo can contain ingredients that are harmful to the environment?

Some of the most common dog shampoo ingredients that may cause harm to the environment are mineral oils, parabens, and synthetic fragrances. Mineral oils are usually included in pet shampoo to condition a dog's coat. But since they don't biodegrade, they could remain in the soil or water for a long time after use. In aquatic environments, they can create an oily film on the water's surface, which disrupts oxygen exchange and can block light from reaching deeper parts of the water. Mineral oils also threaten soil health as they may clog soil, reducing aeration and water infiltration.

Parabens, commonly used as preservatives in many food and care items, are used in most dog shampoos to prevent bacteria and mold growth. If parabens enter the environment, they can disrupt the endocrine system of local wildlife. There is also the potential for the antimicrobial properties of parabens to impact naturally occurring microbiomes in aquatic ecosystems.

Synthetic fragrances are added to dog shampoos to mask the smell of other chemicals and to make our dogs smell good! Unfortunately these chemicals do not break down easily and may pollute the soil, water, and air. Chemical fragrances react with sunlight to create volatile organic compounds, resulting in ozone pollution. A great alternative to most synthetic fragrances is natural scents from sources like essential oils.

Along with screening for harmful ingredients, it is also important to look for good ingredients when buying pet shampoo. Consider looking for ingredients that are natural or naturally derived. And beware of "greenwashing," which is when a company or product claims to be more eco-friendly than it actually is. Always do your research and check for certifications and seals on packaging before purchasing.

A [recent blog post](#) provides details as well as other eco-friendly pet tips.



You and your dog can help make a difference in the health of your local environment!

Blog Recap

In case you missed them the first time around, here are highlights from our most popular blogs of the last few months.



EXPANDING MARINE AND WATERSHED PARTNERSHIPS WITH CAMP OCEAN PINES

April 25, 2025

This guest blog post from Camp Ocean Pines details the results of our education partnership, including curriculum development and a hands-on touch tank!



MAY 2025 FIELD UPDATES: REFLECTIONS FROM A TECH'S FIRST SEASON OF BIOASSESSMENT

May 16, 2025

This blog details a season of bioassessment field work from the perspective of our monitoring technician.



MUTTS FOR THE BAY: TOXIC INGREDIENTS IN DOG SHAMPOO

June 6, 2025

Learn more about the ingredients in your pet care products, including those that may be potentially harmful to pets or the environment.



GET TO KNOW YOUR OCEAN: A GUIDE TO THE TIDES

May 23, 2025

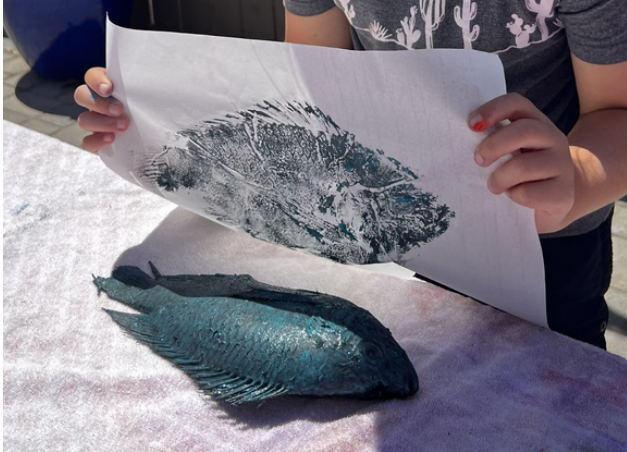
This blog post explains the science behind tides, how to read a tide table, and the importance of knowing the tides when recreating on the water.

[MBNEP.ORG/BLOG](https://mbnep.org/blog)

Upcoming Events

Join us! Learn more at MBNEP.org/events and register for limited-capacity events at MBNEP.Eventbrite.com.

Stay tuned for more events in the upcoming months!



JULY EVENTS

July 24th: Gyotaku (fish prints) with Morro Bay Art Center, 2 to 4 PM

Location: Estuary Program Nature Center, upstairs at 601 Embarcadero

AUGUST EVENTS

August 16th: Town beautification with Morro Bay in Bloom, 9 to 11 AM

Location: Tidelands Park in Morro Bay (look for the white and blue trailer)



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