

FALL 2025

VOL. 3, ISSUE 4

BETWEEN THE Tides

FEATURED



**COMMUNITY PROJECTS
HIGHLIGHT: CURRICULUM
SUPPORT FOR STATE PARKS**



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COMMUNITY AND
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**MUTTS FOR THE BAY
CORNER: VOLUNTEER
SPOTLIGHT**



MORRO BAY
NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR:

FROM SMALL DEPOSITS TO LASTING CHANGE

One of the first signs of fall in Morro Bay is how quickly the air cools after the sun sets. Evening strolls to watch the sunset often mean grabbing a jacket. The tides grow more dramatic as we approach winter's king tide season, and the vegetation shifts as annuals die back and make way for new growth. It is a season of transition – a natural invitation to reflect, wind down the year, and look ahead to what is next.



This fall, I find myself especially grateful not only for the beauty of Morro Bay but for the people who give their time and effort to protect it. We recently hosted a volunteer event in partnership with Morro Bay in Bloom at Tidelands Park. Volunteers removed ivy that was smothering the trees, prepped beds for planting, and restored beauty to a well-loved community space. In just a few hours, the collective energy transformed the area. It was a vivid reminder that care through action is powerful.



When I think of our volunteers, I think of the thousands of hours they have given over the past 30 years – monitoring water quality, cleaning up trash, removing invasive plants, supporting restoration, and so much more. Our organization was founded on volunteer effort and that spirit remains at the heart of our success today. While it is easy to get caught up in the day-to-day, moments like these remind me that our progress has always come from the small but steady contributions of many. These small deposits, given over time, add up to something big and lasting.



As we celebrate three decades as a National Estuary Program, I am grateful for all who have been part of this journey – volunteers, staff, board members, partners, and community members. It is because of your commitment that Morro Bay remains a place worth protecting, a place that will endure for future generations to enjoy.

-Melodie Grubbs, Executive Director

MODELING RESILIENCE: PARTNERSHIPS INFORM HABITAT PLANNING IN MORRO BAY

The Morro Bay estuary provides important ecosystem services to people and wildlife. Its tidal marshes, eelgrass beds, mudflats, dunes, and open water provide critical habitat for fish, birds, and other wildlife while also shielding nearby communities from storm impacts. These habitats buffer Morro Bay and Los Osos from coastal flooding while also providing recreational and economic benefits.

However, extreme weather events and sea level rise (SLR) threaten the estuary as we know it today. If estuarine habitats like the marshes are continually exposed to higher sea levels and storm surge, the fragile habitat can eventually convert to mudflat or open water habitats. While these habitats are also ecologically valuable, this would mean the loss of unique marsh habitat that is essential for species like migratory birds and steelhead trout. One key factor that impacts whether estuary habitats can keep pace with sea level rise is sedimentation.



Monitoring sediment in the salt marsh

The long-term resilience of the marsh depends on sediment remaining in the “Goldilocks” range. Too much sediment can fill in the bay and smother eelgrass beds. It can also degrade water quality and habitat quality for sensitive species like steelhead trout. Too little sediment, however, means marsh elevation cannot keep up with rising water levels, which leads to loss of marsh habitat. When the amount of sediment is just right, marshes can adapt to SLR and maintain their composition and function over time.



To better understand how SLR will impact our estuary, the Estuary Program has partnered with the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) to collect and collate over 20 years of sediment data, model habitat changes under varying sea level rise and sediment scenarios, and work with partners to identify potential management options. This research is funded by the Restore America’s Estuaries Coastal Watershed Grant Program.



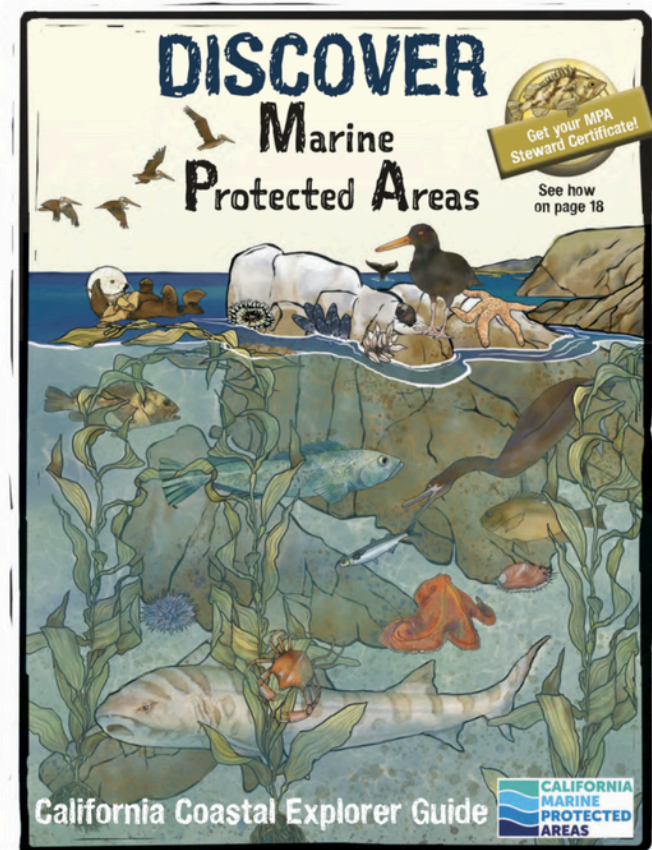
Results from the model will be presented to a group of experts and community members by summer 2026. Their feedback will guide future adaptation planning and management efforts. By pairing advanced science with community input, the Estuary Program hopes to improve the resilience of Morro Bay’s habitats and reduce coastal flooding.



COMMUNITY PROJECTS HIGHLIGHT: CURRICULUM SUPPORT FOR STATE PARKS

The Estuary Program's Community Projects are efforts developed in collaboration with partners to help meet our goals of protecting and restoring Morro Bay. We work together to develop a project to be implemented by the partner. The project must support our monitoring, restoration, research, or educational efforts.

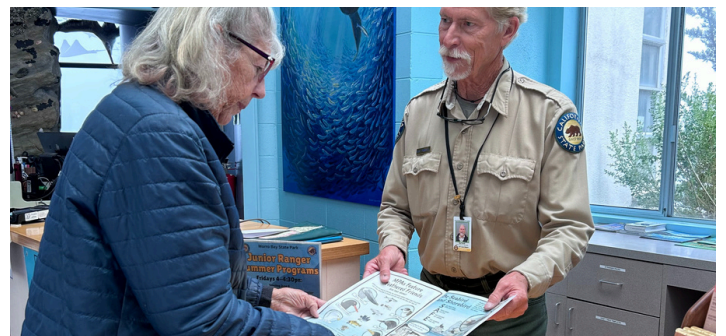
In a recently completed project, the Estuary Program funded the printing of nearly 24,000 copies of the Discover MPAs Activity Guide, a 20-page publication that teaches kids about Marine Protected Areas (MPA) in California. MPAs are a statewide network of coastal areas established through the Marine Life Protection Act. The program seeks to conserve these unique areas while allowing public access for low impact uses such as swimming, diving, and surfing.



This kid-friendly guide includes information on wildlife, ocean safety, marine stewardship, recreational opportunities, and tribal cultural knowledge.



The printed guides were delivered to State Parks staff, who distributed them throughout the San Luis Obispo Coast District including at campgrounds, the Morro Bay Museum of Natural History, the Coastal Discovery Center, local Chambers of Commerce, and at special events. Over the course of the year-long project, nearly all of the guides were distributed! The remainder will be given out in the next few months.



Although the guide is available online, the Estuary Program and State Parks felt there was value in providing a printed guide. Not everyone has a computer and printer at home, and visiting teachers were especially excited to have access to these when they stopped by the Morro Bay Natural History Museum.

The Estuary Program is pleased with this expansion of environmental education content, in collaboration with California State Parks, to benefit students, visitors, and the local community.

SAVING A SHORELINE: COMMUNITY AND CONSERVATION IN ACTION

Highlighting Save Cuesta Inlet, a 100% volunteer-run nonprofit dedicated to preserving public access and wetland habitat on the beloved coastal property:



From dedicated volunteers and residents to partner organizations and advocates, community involvement plays a powerful role in protecting our shared lands. On September 5, Save Cuesta Inlet's grassroots campaign officially raised the \$735,000 needed to purchase Cuesta Inlet, marking a community milestone and an inspirational example of community-driven conservation.

Cuesta Inlet has long been a beloved spot where residents come to launch kayaks, birdwatch, walk their dogs, and more. When the treasured 13-acre bayfront property went up for sale, many locals feared that new ownership could take away public access. Luckily, a group of dedicated community members formed a local nonprofit to ensure long-term public access and habitat health.

With the shared goal of preserving land for both people and wildlife, the Estuary Program partnered with Save Cuesta Inlet and contributed \$60,000 to the cause. "We are deeply grateful, not only for this gift, but for the collaboration it represents," Margarete Schmidt, Save Cuesta Inlet Executive Director said in a press release. "Together, we're working to protect this beloved place so that future generations can enjoy it as much as we do today."

Escrow is set to close on October 1, and Save Cuesta Inlet plans to launch a community-driven process for long-term restoration and open space access. In early 2026, the nonprofit will invite neighbors, supporters, and residents to share input on the next phase of stewardship.



"Protecting Cuesta Inlet is a powerful example of what local leadership and community vision can achieve," Melodie Grubbs, Executive Director of the Estuary Program, said. "We're proud to support this project and excited by the opportunity it creates to work together to preserve access and plan for the future."



Mutts for the Bay Corner: Volunteer Spotlight

When Diane Moore moved to Morro Bay 25 years ago, she didn't know many people — but with a dog by her side, she quickly found community and ways to contribute to it.

"If you didn't have a dog, you probably wouldn't meet very many people. But at the beach, walking my dog, I found out about the program," Diane said. "I thought, okay, I'm going to do some good."



Diane and her dog Toby

Her decision to get involved became even clearer when she noticed an issue close to home.

"I was thankful to God that I got to live here — it was my dream," she explained. "But I saw people just leaving their [dog's] poop right next to the water. If there were no bags, it would keep mounting up. That's what drove me to do what I did."

What began as her refilling pet waste bag dispensers turned into something much bigger. When funds were tight and the program was at risk of ending, she took action and rallied the community together to protect the program.

"I started fundraising — putting out flyers, knocking on doors, leaving notes on windshields at the dog park," Diane said. "People started responding, and then they'd ask, 'How can we help?' I told them, 'You can donate some money for a whole dispenser.' And so, they started doing that, and we raised enough money to keep going every year."

From these donations, the program grew. Today it boasts 36 dispensers and is supported by sponsorships from businesses, organizations, and individuals, as well as a generous grant from the Harold J. Miossi Charitable Trust.

Diane has remained a key part of the Estuary Program's Mutts for the Bay effort — organizing volunteers, stocking bags, and making sure dispensers are always full. "I'm just a good organizer. I'm a people person. And I love dogs, so it all came easy," she explained.

For her, dogs are not just companions but also a reminder to stay present. "If you've got a dog, focus on them," Diane said. "Put your phone down. Look around and enjoy the environment."

Just as dogs keep her grounded, the volunteers keep the program strong. And for Moore, both are reasons to be grateful and optimistic.

"I appreciate all the volunteers. I thoroughly love dogs. And I hope Mutts for the Bay continues long after me," she said. "I hope the program keeps the water clean and the dog poop picked up so the environment stays healthy and generations after me can still enjoy this (Morro Bay)."



Blog Recap

In case you missed them the first time around, here are some of our top blogs from recent months.



CALIFORNIA BIODIVERSITY WEEK: A TIME TO LEARN, EXPLORE, AND CELEBRATE

September 5, 2025

Read about California Biodiversity week, the science behind California's biodiversity, and biodiversity in Morro Bay.



SPOTLIGHT: MEET OUR WATERSHED STEWARDS PROGRAM CORPSMEMBERS

August 22, 2025

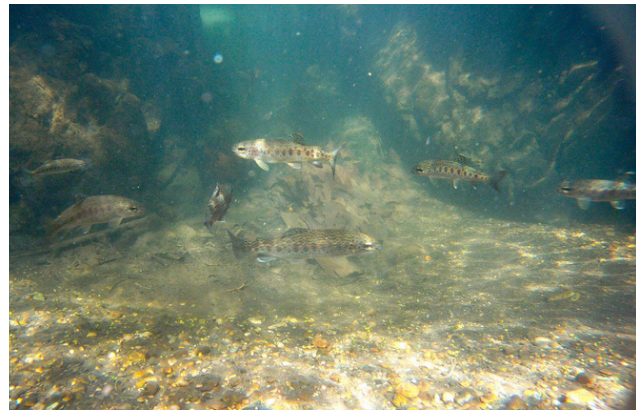
Learn about the hands-on conservation work of Watershed Stewards Program Corpsmembers Shannon and Maeve.



PROTECTING OUR SALT MARSH: INVASIVE SEA LAVENDER UPDATE

August 15, 2025

Learn about how the Estuary Program is protecting native salt marsh habitat by removing invasive European sea lavender.



FIELD UPDATES: INCREASING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF STEELHEAD

September 12, 2025

This blog talks about steelhead migration patterns, PIT tag tracking, and Estuary Program efforts to protect this threatened fish.

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!



OCTOBER EVENTS

October 25: Woods Humane Society

Wiggle Waggle Fall Festival, 12 to 3 PM

Location: 875 Oklahoma Ave,
San Luis Obispo

NOVEMBER EVENTS

November 3: Science on Tap at Oak and
Otter Brewing Co., 6 to 7:30 PM

Location: 181 Tank Farm Rd #110,
San Luis Obispo



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