



# MORRO BAY

## NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Contact:** Bella Slosberg, Community Engagement Coordinator

**Phone:** (805) 242-2155

**Email:** [bslosberg@mbnep.org](mailto:bslosberg@mbnep.org)

### **Morro Bay National Estuary Program Announces New Executive Director**

*The Estuary Program thanks Melodie Grubbs for years of leadership and welcomes Ann Kitajima as the new Executive Director of the Morro Bay National Estuary Program*

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On Jan. 30, Melodie Grubbs stepped down as the Executive Director of the Morro Bay National Estuary Program to pursue conservation work in Northern California. Ann Kitajima, Estuary Program Assistant Director of ten years, stepped into the role of Executive Director on Jan. 31. With Ann's leadership and the support of skilled staff and the Board of Directors, the Estuary Program's work will continue with the same commitment to science, stewardship, and collaboration.

"Leaving this organization has been a difficult decision, but I am proud of our accomplishments and have full confidence in our skilled team," Melodie Grubbs said. "I am thankful for the opportunity I've had to serve the Estuary Program's mission and to work with such a passionate and dedicated community."

Melodie has departed the Central Coast for Northern California, where she will serve as Director of Conservation for the Sonoma Land Trust. Following Melodie's departure, longtime leader Ann Kitajima has assumed the role of Executive Director.

"I am incredibly excited to have the opportunity to lead the Estuary Program, an organization which is near and dear to my heart," Ann said. "It will be a real privilege to lead such amazing and talented staff."

Ann began with the Estuary Program over 20 years ago as the head of the monitoring program where she managed volunteers, collected scientific data, and administered grants to support the program's monitoring efforts. With her deep-rooted program knowledge and exemplary leadership skills, Ann was asked to take on the role of Assistant Director in 2016. Her extensive experience with team leadership, administrative management, and day-to-day operations position her as exceptionally well-qualified to serve as Executive Director.

For more information, visit [mbnep.org/2026/03/02/executive-director-transition/](https://mbnep.org/2026/03/02/executive-director-transition/). The Estuary Program is committed to a transparent transition process and maintaining public confidence in the organization's programs and leadership. Questions regarding this transition may be directed to [staff@mbnep.org](mailto:staff@mbnep.org)

#### **About Morro Bay National Estuary Program**

The Morro Bay National Estuary Program works to protect and restore the Morro Bay estuary, its watershed, and the wildlife and people who depend on it. The program partners with local communities, landowners, and organizations to support clean water, healthy habitats, and public enjoyment of the Bay. Learn more at [www.mbnep.org](http://www.mbnep.org).