

SPRING 2026

VOL. 3, ISSUE 6

BETWEEN THE Tides

FEATURED



**MONITORING A COMPLEX
DYNAMIC IN OUR
WATERSHED**



**RECOGNIZING THE
REMARKABLE COMEBACK OF
EELGRASS IN MORRO BAY**



**MUTTS FOR THE BAY
CORNER: NEW COMMUNITY
DOG EVENT**



MORRO BAY
NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

KICKING OFF STATE OF THE BAY 2026

The Estuary Program and our partners conduct monitoring and research which helps us track the health of our estuary and watershed. Every three years, the Estuary Program gathers the most recent results to develop a 28-page State of the Bay report that addresses common questions such as “Is Morro Bay safe for swimming?” and “Does Morro Bay support healthy eelgrass beds?” We also compile an online webpage version where we have space to include even more monitoring and research results.



In addition to publishing and distributing the report, the Estuary Program hosts and attends a variety of outreach events throughout the spring. These events help to increase public engagement and understanding of the Morro Bay estuary and watershed. Visit our events page for more information on the 12+ events we'll be hosting or attending between March and May.

STATE OF THE BAY

SPRING 2026 EVENTS

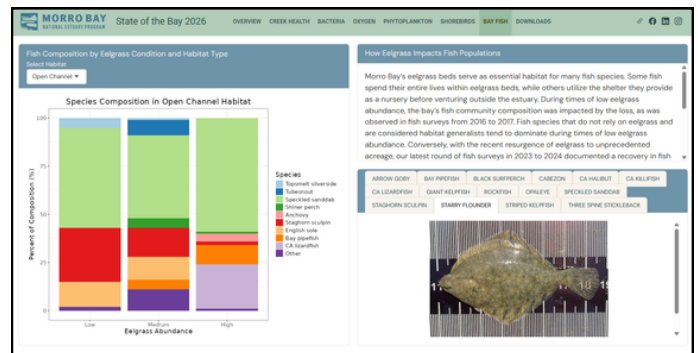
explore our estuary through science

MARCH	APRIL	MAY
MAR 7 MORRO BAY FARMERS' MARKET	APR 11 SLO COUNTY BEAVER FESTIVAL	MAY 7 SCIENCE EXPLORATIONS AT CUESTA COLLEGE
MAR 14 PACK WALK WITH WOODS HUMANE SOCIETY	APR 18 SLO EARTH FEST	MAY 14 SLO FARMERS' MARKET
MAR 15 SWEET SPRINGS BIRDING TRIP WITH MORRO COAST AUDUBON	APR 22 EARTH DAY CLEANUP	MAY 16 WALTERS CREEK SITE VISIT
MAR 19 SCIENCE ON TAP AT OAK AND OTTER	APR 24-27 CITY NATURE CHALLENGE	MAY 26 SCIENCE AFTER DARK AT CENTRAL COAST AQUARIUM

For more info: [MBNEP.ORG/STATE-OF-THE-BAY-2026](https://mbnep.org/state-of-the-bay-2026)

MORRO BAY
NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

This year, we also published our first-ever State of the Bay data dashboard where users can directly interact with the data used to inform the report findings and see additional graphs and infographics detailing the health of our bay and creeks.



We hope you enjoy diving into the findings from our 2026 State of the Bay report and look forward to seeing you at events throughout the spring. Keep reading to learn about selected report findings and upcoming State of the Bay events.

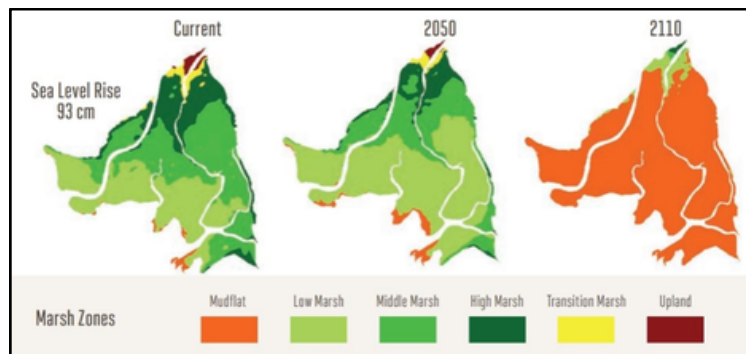


ACCELERATED SEDIMENTATION AND SEA LEVEL RISE: MONITORING A COMPLEX DYNAMIC IN OUR WATERSHED

The movement of sediment is a naturally occurring process in a watershed like Morro Bay. Erosion of stream banks and nearby lands can benefit habitat diversity by creating gravel bars that support steelhead or by forming sandbars that plants can colonize. However, excess erosion from events like intense rainfall after wildfire can have negative impacts on habitat by degrading water quality, clogging stream beds, and smothering eelgrass.



In addition to increased sedimentation, rising waters across the globe present an emerging challenge to tidal marsh habitats like those in the Morro Bay estuary. The 400-acre tidal marsh where Los Osos and Chorro Creeks enter the estuary provides a unique habitat for wildlife and plants adapted to saltwater inundation from incoming tides. Although these areas increase in elevation as sediment from the watershed washes down Chorro and Los Osos Creeks and settles there, rising seas will eventually outpace this natural process. Rising sea levels and coastal flooding threaten this area as higher water levels may drown marsh plants and reduce the habitat available for wildlife.



Estimated habitat changes by 2110 with 93 cm of sea level rise. Maps courtesy of USGS

The Estuary Program has partnered with the US Geological Survey to develop strategies to help preserve the marsh and transition habitats for the wildlife that live there. This work involves using sediment and water-level monitoring data to model how water might move across the estuary with the tides as sea levels rise over time. This work helps identify potential actions to reduce damage to fragile ecosystems, such as providing upland space where the marsh could expand or adding sediment to raise marsh elevation.



Monitoring sediment in the salt marsh with partners from USGS

To learn more, visit the [“How will extreme weather events likely affect the Morro Bay watershed and estuary?”](#) and [“Are the bay and creeks impacted by accelerated sedimentation?”](#) sections of our online State of the Bay webpages.

FROM 13 ACRES TO 750: RECOGNIZING THE REMARKABLE COMEBACK OF EELGRASS IN MORRO BAY

Eelgrass is a flowering plant that puts down roots in our bay floor, forming beds that provide important ecological benefits. In addition to providing habitat, shelter, and breeding grounds for numerous fish and bird species, eelgrass also improves water quality by filtering out excess nutrients, increasing oxygen levels, and stabilizing sediment to help keep the waters clear.



From 2007 to 2016, eelgrass acreage in Morro Bay plummeted by more than 90%, with only 13 acres mapped in 2017. Following the decade-long period of decline, eelgrass acreage turned a corner and has been expanding since 2017. The recovery began slowly with a few dozen acres mapped in 2019, but the rate of expansion has sped up significantly in the past several years. In 2023, a spring survey mapped 750 acres of eelgrass, the highest number ever recorded.



Although the reasons for the decline and the rapid recovery are not fully understood, there are likely multiple factors including changes in water quality and shifts in the bay floor elevation that played a role. Between 2017 and 2022, the Estuary Program implemented restoration efforts and transplanted over 15,000 eelgrass plants at 39 restoration sites in the mid and back bay. While we do not fully attribute the recovery to transplanting, this effort reintroduced eelgrass to areas where it had been lost, aiding expansion through root growth and seed dispersal.



Part of what makes the return of eelgrass in Morro Bay so remarkable is the fact that very few other bays have seen large upward trends in eelgrass populations. To learn more about the state of eelgrass in Morro Bay and ongoing monitoring efforts, check out the [“Does Morro Bay support healthy eelgrass beds?”](#) section of our online State of the Bay report.



Mutts for the Bay Corner

The Estuary Program is dedicated to keeping our bay waters clean so that they continue to support activities that include recreation and oyster farming. One of the ways we do this is by implementing projects to improve local water quality. Our Mutts for the Bay program helps keep harmful bacteria out of our waterways by stocking and maintaining 36 pet waste bag dispensers throughout Morro Bay and Los Osos and educating community members on eco-friendly pet ownership.

As part of our State of the Bay event series, on March 14 our Mutts for the Bay program will host a Saint Pet-Rick's Day themed community pack walk with Woods Humane Society. This will be a fun opportunity for local pet owners to connect and learn more about bay-friendly pet ownership and adoptable pets in San Luis Obispo County.

The event will kick off at Tidelands Park at 10:00 a.m. Attendees will have time to check in and meet other pet owners before heading out on a guided pack walk around the Embarcadero. Saint Pet-Rick's Day themed costumes and outfits are encouraged!



After the walk, stop by our educational booth to hear more about Mutts for the Bay, grab some stickers, and learn all about how you and your pup can be stewards of our bay. For more details and to register for the event, visit our [Eventbrite](#). While we love all dogs, this event is for well-socialized, friendly dogs comfortable being in close proximity to groups of dogs and people.



ST. PET-RICK'S DAY

Pack Walk

MARCH 14TH, 10:00 AM
AT TIDELANDS PARK



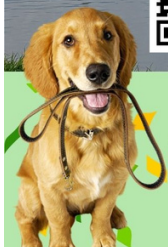
Join us on the 14th to take part in a fun community pack walk, learn about bay friendly pet ownership, and hear about adoptable pets in San Luis Obispo County.



Scan to register



For more info:
MBNEP.ORG/EVENTS





Blog Recap

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



STATE OF THE BAY 2026: UNDERSTANDING BAY HEALTH

February 13, 2026

This blog discusses bay health highlights from our 2026 State of the Bay report, such as bacteria levels in popular recreation zones and how fish populations shift with eelgrass abundance.



MEET FIONA, MONITORING COORDINATOR

January 16, 2026

Get to know Fiona, the Estuary Program's new Monitoring Coordinator. Read about her background, interests, and path to the Estuary Program.



MESSAGE FROM STAFF: WRAPPING UP 2025 AND LOOKING AHEAD TO 2026

January 2, 2026

As 2025 came to a close, staff reflected on a year of action and impact. Read about key accomplishments from 2025 and a message from staff going into 2026.



ESTUARY PROGRAM VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION: CELEBRATING OUR 2025 VOLUNTEERS

December 12, 2025

Volunteers make our work possible. In this blog, read about volunteer accomplishments in 2025 and highlights from our Volunteer Appreciation Event

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!



UPCOMING EVENTS

- MAR 7** MORRO BAY FARMER'S MARKET
2:30-5:30PM
DOWNTOWN MORRO BAY
- MAR 14** COMMUNITY PACK WALK
10:00-11:30AM
TIDELANDS PARK
- MAR 15** BIRDING TRIP WITH MCAS
9:00-11:00AM
SWEET SPRINGS NATURE PRESERVE
- MAR 19** SCIENCE ON TAP TRIVIA NIGHT
6:00-7:30PM
OAK AND OTTER BREWING CO.

For more info:
MBNEP.ORG/EVENTS

 **MORRO BAY**
NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

For more info
and to
register



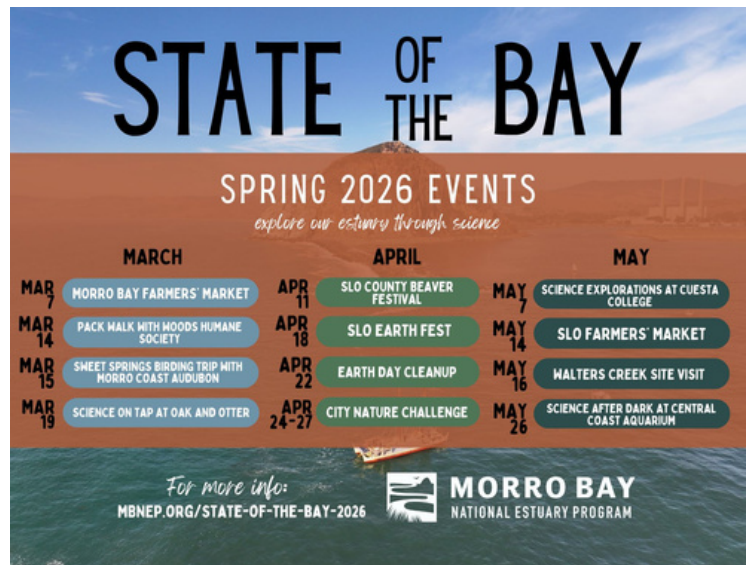
MARCH EVENTS

March 7: Morro Bay Farmer's Market

March 14: Community Pack Walk with Woods Humane Society

March 15: Sweet Springs Birding Trip with Morro Coast Audubon Society

March 19: Science on Tap Trivia Night



STATE OF THE BAY

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explore our estuary through science

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