
Staff Report

1. Introductions and Updates
2. Public Comment
3. Agenda Revisions
4. **ACTION:** Consider Approval of November 18, 2020 Executive Committee (EC) minutes (see attached)
5. **ACTION:** Consider approval of Restoration Fund disbursement for Lazy LS Conservation Easement (see attached)

About three years ago, Larry Sage, owner of the Lazy LS Ranch, expressed interest in a conservation easement to the Estuary Program. Since that time, the Land Conservancy and the Estuary Program have been working to secure funding. The Land Conservancy was recently awarded \$875,000 from California's Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) program to fund 75% of the cost of the easement. A final property appraisal is pending, but the Land Conservancy estimates the remaining funding need at \$321,200. Estuary Program staff recommends allocating our remaining Restoration Fund land conservation funds of \$148,500 (from our FY18-22 spending plan) to support this project. The likelihood of an additional easement being ready for funding prior to FY22 is fairly low; there are currently no other projects on the horizon in the watershed. The landowner is willing to provide additional funds to close the gap, pending the final appraisal. In addition to the conservation values outlined in the attached summary, the easement has additional value to the Estuary Program because it is adjacent to the 1,860-acre Maino Ranch conservation easement (the only easement we now hold).

6. **DISCUSSION:** FY2022 Workplan Ideas (see attached for FY2021 Workplan for reference)

The FY2022 workplan will be due to EPA in June 2021. We expected an increase in funding from \$662,500 to \$700,000. Staff are still working on prioritizing specific project and capacity needs to utilize these funds effectively. At this stage, we are looking for general feedback from the Board on the broad categories of tasks that we anticipate including in the workplan and potential areas we could utilize the additional funds. Our general rule of thumb for the EPA funds is to prioritize projects and program needs that are difficult to fund with other sources and benefit the most from stable funding (examples include long-term monitoring and most staff time). Project for possible additional funding that are listed here have already been identified as priority needs through partner communications, conservation planning, and existing efforts to secure other grant funds. We will need to narrow the list for the final workplan to meet the budget cap.

Workplan Task Categories: (Projects for possible additional funding marked with *)

1. Restoration and Conservation
 - i. Land Conservation
 - ii. Restoration Maintenance and Monitoring
 - iii. Eelgrass Restoration
 - iv. Restoration Project Development
 - v. Morro Bay State Park Marina Stormwater Management Project

- vi. * Aquatic Invasive Species (Pikeminnow) Management
 - vii. * Pre-project planning for Hwy 1/Adobe Road fish passage barrier
 - viii. * Projects identified in the Conservation Planning Initiative to inform future restoration
 - ix. * Sea-level rise analysis (partnership with USGS)
 - x. * Additional restoration capacity/staffing
2. Monitoring and Research
 - i. Monitoring Program Coordination
 - ii. Reporting and Analysis
 - iii. Data Management
 - iv. Quality Assurance
 - v. Project Effectiveness Monitoring
 - vi. Eelgrass Monitoring and Research
 - vii. Partner Research Efforts
 - viii. * State of the Bay Data Analysis
 - ix. * Ocean Acidification Monitoring
 3. Education and Outreach
 - i. Communications
 - ii. Education
 - iii. Community Partner Projects
 - iv. Mutts for the Bay
 - v. * Additional E&O capacity/staffing
 4. Program Administration
 - i. Manage Committees and Partnerships
 - ii. Grants and Contracts Administration and Financial Management
 - iii. General Administration and Human Resources Management
 - iv. CCMP Implementation Tracking
 - v. Community Projects Program

7. DISCUSSION: Community Project Update

The EC approved funding for two projects at the November meeting. Staff worked with both applicants to get contracts in place. Projects are currently underway. Staff checked in with each project team.

- Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District Monarch and Pollinators Program: CSLRCD is coordinating with the Morro Coast Audubon Society (MCAS) to partner on the project and use Sweet Springs as a site. MCAS already has management plan documents in place that were created by some Cal Poly professors, which really strengthens it as a restoration site. PG&E is giving some mitigation funding to CSLRCD to be spent on Morro Bay shoulderband snail enhancements, so it's likely that the Community Project and the mitigation funding could be combined to get more restoration work implemented. The work is expected to be completed in the fall/early winter.
- Dr. Nikki Adams Microplastics Monitoring Project: Dr. Adams and her team have been moving forward with purchasing equipment, training, recruiting students, and obtaining the required permits. Although COVID and challenges with applying for permits has put them slightly behind schedule, workarounds are already being found for these obstacles. Dr. Adams was able to obtain some additional funding for equipment, which brings additional match to the Estuary Program. While slightly behind schedule, monitoring is expected to begin soon.

8. DISCUSSION: Program Evaluation (PE) Letter update (see attached)

In past years, staff provide an update on the status of activities to address the challenges identified by EPA in the PE letter. The attached summary describes activities underway or planned to address these challenges. Challenges for us to address include reporting measurable outcomes from projects,

completing our CCMP update, expanding outreach to a more diverse audience, and addressing water reuse and hazard mitigation.

9. DISCUSSION: Program Highlights

- **National Updates:** In an almost unbelievable development, the legislation to re-authorize the National Estuary Program was passed by Congress at the very end of the last session and signed into law on January 13th (the very last possible day before a pocket veto would go into effect). Our Morro Bay-specific press release is at: <https://www.mbnep.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/CONGRESS-MOVES-TO-INVEST-IN-THE-NATIONS-ESTUARIES.pdf>.
- **Another grant for eelgrass restoration:** Out of 206 applications, the Estuary Program's grant for eelgrass restoration and research was one of eight final selected projects. Representative Carbajal shared a message of congratulations during the online event to publicize the selected projects: <https://estuaries.org/initiatives/watershedgrants/2020-nep-coastal-watersheds-grant-awardees/>
- **Blog updates:** Have you checked out the blog lately? Many of our articles are written by different staff members, interns, and volunteers. The latest entry is a very timely one about First Flush by Ann Kitajima: <https://www.mbnep.org/2021/01/29/first-flush-in-the-morro-bay-watershed/>
- **Hiring a Monitoring Projects Manager:** Karissa Willits, our current Monitoring Projects Manager, has decided to move on from the Estuary Program to pursue other field work job opportunities in greener and wetter climes (Pacific Northwest!). She was very thoughtful in providing us a lot of lead time so that we will hopefully be able to hire a new person for her position before she leaves and allow some overlap in March and/or April for training. We are looking for someone with a few years of experience and with freshwater field experience specifically: <https://www.mbnep.org/job-openings/>. Please share the position with any potential candidates or networks that may be interested.

10. Adjourn to next meeting of May 17, 2021 at 4:00 p.m., to be held remotely via Zoom.

Attachments:

- Minutes from November 18, 2020 EC meeting
- Lazy LS Project Description
- PE letter status
- FY2021 Workplan