



FEATURED



**2024 CREEK HEALTH UPDATE:
OUR BIOASSESSMENT
SCORES ARE IN!**



**EDUCATION AND OUTREACH:
JOIN OUR UPCOMING EVENTS**



**MUTTS FOR THE BAY
CORNER**



MORRO BAY
NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

RENEWING OUR COMMITMENT TO MORRO BAY: 30 YEARS OF STEWARDSHIP IN A TIME OF UNCERTAINTY

As winter gives way to spring, we find ourselves at a moment of both celebration and challenge. This year marks 30 years since Morro Bay was designated as part of the National Estuary Program, a milestone that underscores the importance of long-term conservation efforts. Protecting and restoring an estuary doesn't happen overnight – it takes decades of monitoring, research, and collaboration. The work we do today builds upon the efforts of those before us and lays the foundation for a healthier bay and watershed.

However, this anniversary comes at a time of uncertainty. Federal funding freezes and questions about the future of the National Estuary Programs remind us that conservation requires resilience. The support of federal partners has been critical to our success, but what has always sustained us is our community – the local organizations, researchers, volunteers, and residents who care deeply about this estuary.



Despite these challenges, our work continues. We've seen real progress, from the recovery of eelgrass to the repair of sensitive habitats that benefit people and wildlife. Our expanded education efforts engage the environmental stewards of the next generation. Our long-term scientific monitoring allows us to track changes in the environment, providing essential data that informs management decisions. These efforts don't just benefit Morro Bay today, they ensure its health for future generations.

Resilience is at the core of both nature and conservation. Morro Bay has changed over the past 30 years, and so has the way we protect it. As we celebrate this milestone, we recognize that our mission is more important than ever. The challenges we face only reinforce the need for continued commitment, adaptation, and strong partnerships.

Thirty years ago, the Morro Bay community came together to protect this place. Today, we remain just as dedicated to that vision. While the future may be uncertain, one thing is clear – Morro Bay is worth fighting for, and together, we will continue to protect it.

-Melodie Grubbs, Executive Director

2024 CREEK HEALTH UPDATE: OUR BIOASSESSMENT SCORES ARE IN!

Each spring, our staff and volunteers take to the creeks for bioassessment monitoring. Our team measures habitat health and collects benthic macroinvertebrates (BMIs), which are insects living on the creek bottoms. These creatures tell us something about water quality in the creeks. While some species are very sensitive to pollution, others can tolerate or even thrive in polluted waters. The presence of sensitive species indicates that water quality is likely good.



The presence of sensitive BMIs like this aquatic beetle indicate good water quality since they can only thrive in clean waters.

The 2024 fieldwork was supported by Cal Poly's Natural Resources Management & Environmental Sciences Department and corpsmembers from the [California Conservation Corps Watershed Stewards Program](#). The team surveyed ten creek sites throughout the watershed.



The photos above illustrate the dramatic impact of the January 2023 storms on Pennington Creek. The photo on the left shows the site before the storms, while the right shows the same location a week later. The site suffered significant erosion, which drastically altered the streambed and surrounding vegetation.

The heavy rains of 2023 flushed quite a bit of sediment through the creeks, displacing the BMIs living there. The creek health scores were lower than normal, even in creeks like Dairy and Pennington that usually have high quality habitat. We're happy to report that the 2024 data indicates widespread recovery from the damaging storms of 2023. There were big improvements in the scores for the tributaries, which are the smaller creeks that drain into Chorro Creek. We found that scores on Chorro Creek weren't as negatively impacted by the storms of 2023, but they also didn't show as much improvement in 2024 as the tributaries did. This finding coincides with research that found that BMIs in small streams are more vulnerable to flooding and disturbance in the short-term but can recover more quickly than larger streams.



This long-running data set was made possible by the generous support of the Harold J. Miozzi Charitable Trust. Since 2013, the Trust has provided over \$140,000 for this effort. This valuable data allows us to track long-term changes and assess watershed health over time. To learn more about the Miozzi Charitable Trust, please visit miossicharitabletrust.org

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH: JOIN OUR UPCOMING EVENTS

Our Education & Outreach Program has an exciting spring season ahead! In April, we will be celebrating Earth Month with a variety of events throughout SLO County, including our annual Earth Day cleanup on Saturday, April 19 at Morro Rock.

On April 24, we will be hosting our first Science on Tap event of the year from 6 to 7:30 p.m. at Oak & Otter Brewing Co. The brewery holds a monthly Give Back Thursday event, and a portion of the day's proceeds will go to the Estuary Program.



With the help of community members and volunteers, we picked up over 100 pounds of trash last year at Morro Rock!



Estuary Program staff presented on our monitoring projects at a Science on Tap at Oak & Otter Brewing in 2024.

We are also excited to announce our participation in the 10th annual City Nature Challenge, in partnership with the SLO chapters of the California Native Plant Society and The Wildlife Society. During this global community science event from April 25 through April 29, participants are encouraged to use the iNaturalist app to document wildlife observations where they live. You can head out on your own or join one of the many “bioblitz” events happening throughout the county. Keep an eye on the iNaturalist journal page to learn more about this exciting community science opportunity.

For more details on these and other upcoming events, visit <https://www.mbnep.org/events/> and be sure to follow us on Instagram, Facebook, or Eventbrite.



Mutts for the Bay Corner

Our Mutts for the Bay program manages a network of 36 pet waste bag dispensers throughout Morro Bay and Los Osos. It is important to pick up after pets since bacteria from dog poop can seep into the groundwater or get washed into creeks, the estuary, and the ocean. Dog waste does not break down in the same way as wild animal poop, and it contains twice as much bacteria as human waste. Last year our program provided over 330,000 bags for the community.

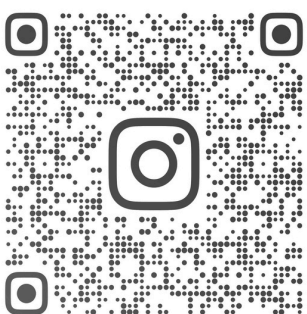
Our dispensers stay stocked thanks a network of dedicated volunteers and the financial support of our sponsors. Individuals, businesses, and nonprofits can sponsor dispensers, providing the needed funding to keep them stocked for the year.



We are seeking sponsors for the following dispensers:

- Del Mar Park at the Island St entrance
- Jody Giannini Family Dog Park (at Del Mar Park) - both small & large dog parks
- Lila Keiser Park – 2 locations
- Baywood Pier in Los Osos

Please reach out at info@mbnep.org if you are interested in sponsoring a dispenser to help keep our watershed clean and beautiful!



FOLLOW OUR
INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT
@MUTTSFORTHEBAY

Blog Recap

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



GRATITUDE FOR OUR VOLUNTEERS

December 20, 2024

Read up on our volunteers at the Estuary Program, what they were up to in 2024, and how important their work is for the health of our watershed.



DECEMBER 2024 FIELD UPDATES: FALL EELGRASS MONITORING AND RESEARCH EFFORTS

January 10, 2025

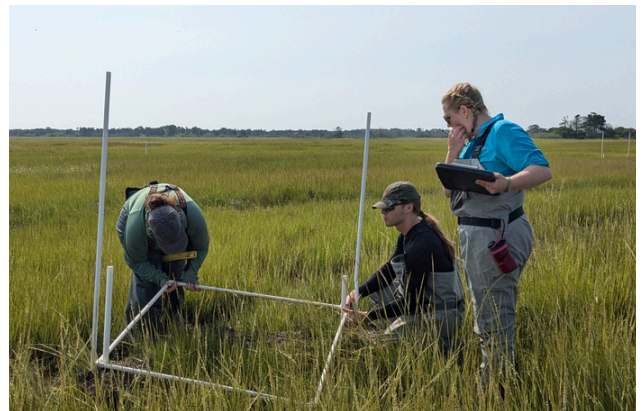
Check out the December Field Updates blog to learn about our recent eelgrass mapping and monitoring efforts as well as next steps.



EDUCATION 2024 WRAP-UP AND LOOKING AHEAD

January 24, 2025

Want to learn more about our education program? This blog discusses our work with our education partners in 2024 and our future plans for the program!



NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT SERIES: BARNEGAT BAY PARTNERSHIP

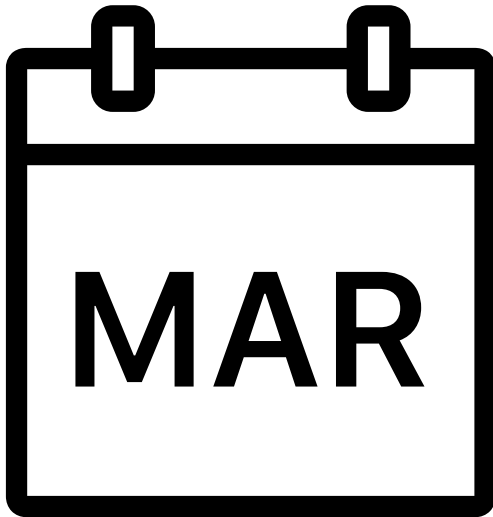
February 7, 2025

Interested in learning more about other National Estuary Programs? This blog is part of a series to introduce our community to the work of other NEPs around the country.

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!



MARCH EVENTS

March 8th:

Coastal Ocean Literacy educator workshop series, day 3

APRIL EVENTS

April 10th: SLO Farmer's Market, 6 to 9 p.m.

April 19th: Earth Week beach cleanup at Morro Rock, time TBD

April 24th: Science on Tap at Oak & Otter Brewing, 6 to 7:30 p.m.

April 25th-28th: City Nature Challenge, all weekend across SLO County



[MBNEP.ORG/EVENTS](https://MBNEP.org/events)

[MBNEP.EVENTBRITE.COM](https://MBNEP.Eventbrite.com)