



**Executive Committee Quarterly Meeting
Estuary Program Offices, Morro Bay, CA
and via Video Conferencing**

**February 19, 2025
4:00 pm**

Minutes

Attendees: Jason Curtis, *Bay Foundation*; Phil Hammer, *Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board*; Becka Kelly, *Morro Bay Harbor Department*; John Flaherty, *Recreation/Tourism seat*; Vivian Lopez, *USEPA*; Lisen Bonnier, *Watershed Land Management seat*; Kate Ballantyne, *SLO County Public Works*; Dr. Crow White, *Cal Poly University*; Ann Kitajima, *MBNEP Staff*; Melodie Grubbs, *MBNEP Staff*; Jodi Marfia, *MBNEP Staff*

1. Introductions and Updates

- Jason Curtis: Representing the Bay Foundation. No update from Cuesta College or the Bay Foundation board.
- Phil Hammer: Representing the Water Board. The Central Coast Regional Water Board is potentially entering a settlement agreement with the California Men's Colony (CMC) to address ongoing issues including sewage spills, effluent violations, etc. These impacts to Chorro Creek have been an ongoing problem. CMC will have to pay a fine in addition to correcting the issues. The Supplemental Environmental Project (SEP) will fund well testing for private rural homeowners. The Water Board will be coming to the Estuary Program offices on Friday for their board meeting and for an educational field trip.
- John Flaherty: Representing the Recreation/Tourism seat. John reported that this year was their most successful Winter Birdfest thus far with over 800 people participating in workshops and field trips.
- Becka Kelly: Representing Morro Bay Harbor Department. The Harbor Department was awarded an additional \$38,000 from the Division of Boating and Waterways for derelict boat removal from the bay. They will soon be posting a request for proposal this week for the removal of eight derelict vessels in the next six weeks. They are hoping to complete the work prior to when the rock fish season starts on April 1. They are in the planning phase for dredging in May and inner-harbor dredging in December 2025.
- Lisen Bonnier: Representing the Watershed Land Management seat. During the heavy rains last week, local farmers had runoff that made its way to the bay. Many farmers did manage to keep their soils stable using cover crops. Based on the lack of rain thus far and seeing little in the forecast, it's looking like it will be a drought year.
- Kate Ballantyne: Representing San Luis Obispo (SLO) County. The County has awarded a contract to Carollo Engineers for planning for a regional desalination project. The planning is expected to be a four-year process. In Los Osos, the County is undertaking recycled water projects to distribute treated wastewater to Los Osos Middle School, Monarch Grove Elementary, and the community park. All construction will take place this summer.
- Crow White: Representing the Science and Research seat. No updates.
- Vivian Lopez: Representing the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). All workplans and other documents for the program must be in line with the Executive Orders issued by the new administration. Environmental Justice and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion components of programs like the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) are not statutorily required, and only things required by the statute should be included in the project workplan, etc.
- Melodie Grubbs: Updates to come later in meeting.
- Ann Kitajima: Updates to come later in meeting.
- Jodi Marfia: No updates.

2. Public Comment

None.

3. Agenda Revisions

None.

4. ACTION: Approval of meeting minutes from November 20, 2024 Executive Committee (EC) meeting (see attached)

Vote: Jason motioned to approve the minutes as presented. Kate seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

5. ACTION: Member re-election

Vote: Jason made the motion to approve the re-election of Lisen Bonnier to an additional three-year term. Kate seconded. All in favor. None opposed.

6. DISCUSSION: FY26 320 workplan

Staff reviewed the major changes to the workplan tasks, which are the addition of a task for planning and implementing State of the Bay events and a task for invasive species management. Staff encouraged EC members to reach out in the next month or so with any potential project ideas. The group will vote on a draft 320 Workplan at the May EC meeting.

As we don't yet know the funding amount for FY26, we are proceeding with planning for the same amount of funding that we received in FY25 of \$850,000. During the discussion, Jason asked if we should be doing any worst case scenario planning. Mel said we have been considering various scenarios with a focus on reducing costs, looking at reserves, and considering possible fund reallocations. Mel noted that the budget created by President Biden in the fall and those from the Senate and House all had an amount for the NEPs that was similar to the FY25.

7. DISCUSSION: Program Evaluation update

Staff are working to develop the narrative document for submittal by April 1. The site visit has been scheduled for July 8 to 10. There will be a reception in the office, with partners invited to attend. Becka offered a tour on the water on a Harbor Department boat. Getting out on the water was something specifically requested by EPA for the visit.

8. DISCUSSION: Rose Foundation grants update

Staff shared an overview of the projects funded by the Rose Foundation. Jason asked how many total proposals were submitted. Mel will find out and inform the EC at a later date.

9. DISCUSSION: Habitat Protection and Restoration Strategy (HPRS) update

Staff explained that this is an ancillary plan to our CCMP that dives more into the types of habitats we have with a focus on mid and long range planning.

Staff shared that the plan was approved by EPA in January. Climate change is a central part of the plan and because a recently issued Executive Order prohibits any work related to the topic, EPA and staff are currently unsure how the document will be impacted.

10. DISCUSSION: Program Highlights

- **Administration Updates:**
 - The new Administration has issued Executive Orders that align with its new priorities. The past four weeks have been challenging with grants being frozen and eventually unfrozen. Staff have been doing

scenario planning and preparing. We currently have access to BIL and 320 funds. Directors from other NEPs are unified and are working together to stay focused and align with Executive Orders. We are proceeding with caution and have paused some larger BIL projects. We were expecting two additional years of BIL funding, so the availability of those funds is key to continuing these projects.

- **Monitoring Updates:**

- Staff shared some of the preparations for spring fieldwork.
- We received the results our 2024 Bioassessment monitoring effort and were happy to report that the numbers were much improved from the 2023 numbers when big winter storms heavily impacted our creeks. Learn more from a recent blog : <https://www.mbnep.org/2025/01/31/how-healthy-are-our-creeks-results-from-2024-bioassessment-monitoring/> We just received word that the Harold J. Miossi Charitable Trust will provide an additional three years of support for this project.

- **Restoration Updates:**

- Unfortunately, during the feasibility study for the San Luisito Creek fish passage barrier removal project we discovered that water lines and a gas line run through the project area. If the project moved forward, this would cause logistical water supply issues and greatly increase project costs.
- Drone flights were completed along Walters Creek for future floodplain projects. A lack of rain may delay the projects.
- We re-treated acres of ice plant that were originally treated last year to take care of sprouts and regrowth. The sites are looking good, with many of the native plants beginning to return.

- **Communications, Outreach & Education Updates:**

- The first session of our three-party teacher training was a success.
- 2025 is our 30th year anniversary and to help celebrate, the [Morro Bay Art Center](#) is hosting an Estuary and Marsh exhibition from February 20 through March 31.
- For more information on upcoming events, visit our website at <https://www.mbnep.org/events/>

11. Adjourned at 4:56 p.m. to the next meeting of May 21, 2025 at 4:00 p.m., to be held via Zoom and in the Morro Bay offices.

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