STATE OF CALIFORNIA
REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
CENTRAL COAST REGION

STAFF REPORT FOR REGULAR MEETING OF FEBRUARY 20-21, 2025

Prepared on January 8, 2025

ITEM NUMBER: **15**

SUBJECT: **Field Trip – Morro Bay National Estuary Program**

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ACTION: **Information/Field Trip**

SUMMARY

This item is a field trip to the Morro Bay National Marine Estuary Program (MBNEP) in Morro Bay. The field trip will include a visit to the Morro Bay Estuary Nature Center and presentations by staff from the MBNEP/Bay Foundation of Morro Bay, Central Coast Ambient Monitoring Program, Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary, and Northern Chumash Tribal Council Monitoring Program. An overview of the presentations is provided below. The public is invited to participate; however, space is very limited, and reservations are required in advance and transportation will not be provided. Please see the agenda[1] for information on the meeting and how to RSVP for the field trip.

DISCUSSION

Morro Bay National Estuary Program / Bay Foundation of Morro Bay

The MBNEP is a non-regulatory nonprofit that brings together citizens, organizations, agencies, and landowners to protect and restore the Morro Bay estuary for people and wildlife. Morro Bay was designated as a state estuary in 1994 and an Estuary of National Significance in 1995. The MBNEP is one of twenty-eight National Estuary Programs across the county that are working to safeguard and improve the health of the nation's most important coastal waters. The MBNEP conducts monitoring and research, conserves and restores natural habitats, and engages with the community to help foster good stewards of Morro Bay.

[1] https://waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/board_info/agendas/2025/2025_agendas.html

The nonprofit home for the MBNEP is the Bay Foundation of Morro Bay (Bay Foundation), a 501(c)(3) organization. The Bay Foundation is an all-volunteer board of directors, providing the administrative framework for the MBNEP. The Bay Foundation applies for grants, manages the program's funding, and employs the staff.

The Central Coast Ambient Monitoring Program (CCAMP) has operated as a "public-private partnership" with the Bay Foundation and other non-governmental organizations since 1998. In 2007, the Central Coast Water Board adopted Resolution R3-2007-0042[2] and Resolution R3-2007-0064 [3] to establish the CCAMP Endowment Fund in coordination with the Bay Foundation, and in 2012, the Central Coast Water Board adopted Resolution R3-2012-0024[4] to establish an endowment for the Groundwater Assessment and Protection program component of CCAMP (referred to as CCAMP-GAP). The CCAMP and CCAMP-GAP endowments continue to be managed by the Bay Foundation, and staff from the Central Coast Water Board coordinate with the Bay Foundation to provide technical support and collaboration. The Bay Foundation also manages the Central Coast Low Impact Development Initiative (LIDI) account. For more information about the MBNEP and Bay Foundation, please visit: https://www.mbnep.org/

Central Coast Ambient Monitoring Program

CCAMP, established in 1998, is the Central Coast Water Board's regional surface water monitoring program, providing long-term trend data for surface water quality in all our major central coast watersheds. As described above, CCAMP is supported by an endowment and is implemented in coordination with the State Water Resource Control Board's Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program (SWAMP) and the Bay Foundation.

Since 1998, CCAMP has collected data on the status of central coast surface water quality, with a particular focus on characterizing the status and trends in freshwater rivers and streams. CCAMP conducts ongoing monitoring of all major river and stream mouths at their outflow to the ocean at 33 coastal confluence sites, which track long-term water quality trends in streams and rivers entering the ocean. These monitoring sites are sampled monthly and help provide information on water quality conditions near marine environment including all Marine Protected Areas on the central coast. CCAMP routinely collects basic measures of water quality, and has collected other measures, including organic chemistry and metals in sediment and water, toxicity assessment in sediment and water, bio-assessment for invertebrates and algae, and habitat assessment, on a less frequent basis at a sub-set of sites.

CCAMP data is available to all users via the California Environmental Data Exchange Network (CEDEN) and CCAMP's "Data Navigator"[5], a public web-based tool that

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[2] https://waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/board_info/agendas/2007/march/item13/item_13_att2.pdf
[3] https://waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/board_info/agendas/2008/feb/item9/item9_attachment6.pdf
[4] https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/water_issues/programs/gap/docs/res_r3-2012-0024_final.pdf
[5] www.ccamp.org

provides easy and informative access to maps, graphs, and charts of regional surface water quality-related data.

CCAMP data is routinely used by program staff to inform programmatic implementation and water quality decisions. For example, the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), Irrigated Lands Program (ILP), and Basin Planning Program all rely on CCAMP data for programmatic surface water quality assessments. In addition, CCAMP is an important public data source to inform the Clean Water Act Section 303(d) List of Impaired Waterbodies and California Integrated Report[6].

CCAMP also coordinates with the State Water Board's Freshwater and Estuarine Harmful Algal Bloom (FHAB) Program to conduct FHAB monitoring at a subset of waterbodies located in the Central Coast Region prior to high recreation holiday weekends including Memorial Day, Independence Day (July 4th), and Labor Day. FHAB monitoring efforts focus on waterbodies where swimming, fishing, and domestic pet recreation occur. In coordination with the State Water Board, CCAMP continues to work with local partners and waterbody managers to facilitate FHAB monitoring efforts, assist with sample analysis, and provide guidance and recommendations for posting appropriate advisories to inform the public of the health risks associated with FHABs. More information and data are available on the California Harmful Algal Blooms Portal.[7]

Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary

Designated on November 30, 2024, Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary (CHNMS) is America's 17th national marine sanctuary, the sixth off the U.S. West Coast, and is one of the largest in the National Marine Sanctuary System. The sanctuary encompasses 4,543 square miles of coastal and ocean waters offshore Central California stretching nearly 60 miles from shore and down to a maximum depth of 11,580 feet. The sanctuary protects and collaboratively manages natural and cultural resources, fascinating maritime historical resources, and rich Indigenous cultural history along 116 miles of coastline stretching from just south of Diablo Canyon Power Plant in San Luis Obispo County to Naples Reef on the Gaviota Coast in Santa Barbara County. Cities along this stretch of coastline include Avila Beach, Pismo Beach, Grover Beach, Arroyo Grande, Goleta, neighboring Santa Barbara, and further inland lies San Luis Obispo, Guadalupe, Santa Maria, and Lompoc. The sanctuary also brings new opportunities for research, community engagement, and education and outreach activities. For more information about the CHNMS, please visit: https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/chumash-heritage/

Northern Chumash Tribal Council Monitoring Program

As discussed at the December 10-11, 2024 Central Coast Water Board Meeting, the Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment (Rose Foundation) recently awarded $200,000 to the Northern Chumash Tribal Council (NCTC) to implement the

[6] https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/water_issues/programs/tmdl/303d_list.html
[7] https://mywaterquality.ca.gov/habs/index.html

Northern Chumash Tribal Council Monitoring Program project, funded by the Central Coast Community Based Water Quality Grants Program.

The project will facilitate Tribal outreach and education while increasing Tribal community engagement in the Central Coast region. NCTC is a small disadvantaged HUBZone-certified organization led by Tribal members, 70% of whom are women. Since its inception, the group has worked to advance environmental justice and Tribal leadership in all aspects of land and ocean management by promoting inclusion, multilingual and multicultural outreach focusing on underserved communities. However, tribal members need to better understand contemporary scientific methods and tools to implement water quality projects and climate plans, including the inclusion of Traditional Ecological Knowledge Indigenous ways into management decisions for the waters and waterways that flow to the proposed Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary boundaries. The grant will enable training focused on GIS, water quality monitoring, data collection, and analysis of data from Water Board database, and members will learn about water sampling protocols using the Regional Board's Surface Water Ambient Monitoring Program as well as US EPA's protocols. The funds will also be used to obtain equipment and training needed to use geographic information systems to map sampling data. This effort will advance environmental justice and provide benefits to underrepresented communities by training Indigenous Tribes and Tribal organizations to perform water quality monitoring themselves for a variety of parameters in surface waters impacting the Chumash Heritage National Marine Sanctuary. The project will conclude with the creation of a Chumash Tribal Monitoring Training Program Handbook and outreach materials that will be shared with other Central Coast Chumash communities. Further, the project will serve as a model and empower other Tribes with the information gained and empower Chumash people to perform their science-based citizen monitoring to further Tribal Collaborative Management approaches. This work will facilitate more equitable and collaborative management of natural resources that includes all who are culturally affiliated with the area of the proposed sanctuary and/or the surrounding lands and waterways. For more information about the NCTC, please visit: https://northernchumash.org/