

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
CENTRAL COAST REGION

STAFF REPORT FOR REGULAR MEETING OF MARCH 23, 2007

Prepared on February 21, 2007

ITEM NO: 12

SUBJECT: Morro Bay National Estuary Program Update

SUMMARY

The Morro Bay National Estuary Program has operated in the Morro Bay Watershed and Estuary under an approved Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan since 2000. Since that time, the Morro Bay National Estuary Program has taken action on a great many of the priority actions identified in that plan. Dan Berman, Estuary Program Director, will update the Regional Water Quality Control Board (Water Board) on recent accomplishments of the MBNEP and on status of the Morro Bay Restoration fund.

DISCUSSION

Morro Bay is designated both a State and National Estuary, and the Morro Bay National Estuary Program is leading the effort to protect and restore this nationally significant resource. The Estuary Program is a collaborative effort engaging diverse stakeholders, agencies, and the broader community. The non-profit Bay Foundation of Morro Bay provides the legal, fiscal, and administrative framework for the program. The Estuary Program's approach is based on four interrelated tactics:

- **protect** habitat and water quality through acquisitions and easements;
- **restore** habitat and water quality through pollution reduction and habitat restoration projects;
- **educate** the community to reduce non point source pollution one person at a time, and;

- **understand** the ecosystem and the effectiveness of our efforts through scientific investigation and monitoring.

After five years of intensive investigations, community engagement, and broad stakeholder input, the Estuary Program's watershed-based management plan, the "Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan", was formally approved and adopted at the local, state, and federal level in 2000. Since that date the Estuary Program has:

- Permanently protected through acquisitions and conservation easements over 3,000 acres of habitat;
- Completed intensive riparian restoration projects on over a mile of creek corridors, including erosion control, riparian fencing, and planting thousands of native plants;
- Removed from the estuary over 15 derelict boats, and eliminated longstanding illegal moorings in Windy Cove;
- The MBNEP grant program has awarded over 50 grants to local partners totaling over \$1.3 million for projects ranging from stream restoration and pollution reduction, to funding school field trips and creating an estuary learning center at the Los Osos Library.
- The Morro Bay Volunteer Monitoring Program has engaged hundreds of community members to collect an invaluable long-term water quality data

set encompassing the Morro Bay watershed and estuary.

A key component in the Estuary Program's success has been the Morro Bay Restoration Fund. The Morro Bay Restoration Fund was established at a value of \$3.66 million dollars in 1997 as part of a larger Consent Decree settlement involving the Regional Board. The Restoration Fund was dedicated to the implementation of the Estuary Program's management plan. The Restoration Fund has been held and managed by the Bay Foundation at no cost, and through prudent investments, the fund has earned approximately \$1 million, even as the fund is gradually being spent. The total allocations to date of \$4.217 million dollars have helped implement projects with an estimated total value of \$21.35 million, a leveraging ratio of roughly 4 to 1. Additional information on the status of the Morro Bay Restoration Fund is found in a summary memo to the MBNEP Executive Committee, included in Attachment 1.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Board information only. No action required.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1. Consent Decree Update Memo to MBNEP Executive Committee

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