

SPRING 2024

VOL. 2, ISSUE 2



FEATURED



**SPRING HAPPENINGS IN THE
WATERSHED: BIOASSESSMENT
MONITORING**



**CLEANUPS AND MARINE
LITTER IN THE MORRO BAY
ESTUARY**



**MUTTS FOR THE BAY
CORNER**



MORRO BAY
NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAM

SPRING LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

The Vital Role of Riparian Restoration

Morro Bay estuary, a vibrant ecosystem teeming with life, serves as a vital link between land and sea. The health of the bay is intricately connected to the health of the lands that surround it, making upland restoration efforts crucial for protecting the bay.

Stretching from the rugged peaks of the Santa Lucia Range to the meandering creeks that feed into Morro Bay, the watershed is the area of land that drains into the estuary. As rainfall and runoff make their way downstream, they carry with them sediment, nutrients, and pollutants that can end up in the bay and negatively impact water quality and habitat health. Proper management and conservation measures in the watershed help protect the bay's ecosystems.

Restoration is a crucial component of watershed stewardship. Riparian zones are the transition areas between land and waterways like our creeks. They play a vital role in filtering pollutants, stabilizing stream banks, and providing habitat for a diverse array of plant and animal species. By restoring and enhancing these areas through projects such as streambank stabilization, native vegetation planting, and invasive species removal, we not only improve water quality but also create healthier and more resilient habitats.

Riparian restoration also has broader implications for climate resilience and adaptation. Healthy riparian zones act as buffers that help mitigate flooding, regulate streamflow, and provide refuge for species vulnerable to habitat loss. These riparian restoration efforts not only protect these special habitats but also improve our communities' resilience to the challenges posed by a changing climate.



Projects like the restoration of Chorro Creek Ecological Reserve have played key roles in the overall health of the watershed. This project created a five-acre healthy creek corridor that now provides enhanced habitat for wildlife and floodplains that prevent flooding during storm events. Our monitoring programs in the creek, like our bioassessment effort, help us understand the health of these systems and inform potential management actions.

By restoring and enhancing riparian zones, we can improve water quality, enhance habitat connectivity, and bolster the resilience of these important ecosystems to safeguard the natural heritage of Morro Bay for generations to come.

-Melodie Grubbs, Executive Director

SPRING HAPPENINGS IN THE WATERSHED: BIOASSESSMENT MONITORING

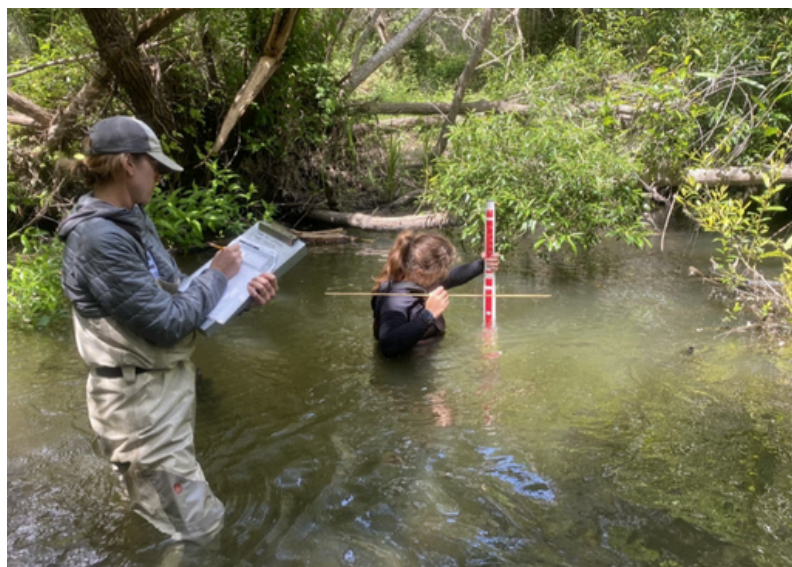
Each spring, Estuary Program staff and volunteers head out to local creeks to conduct bioassessment monitoring. During this annual effort, we collect nearly 1,500 data points at each site to help us understand whether our creeks can support sensitive aquatic life. These measurements include things like water chemistry, presence of algae and organic matter, rock size, human influence, creek slope, and much more. We also collect bottom-dwelling aquatic insects called benthic macroinvertebrates. The macroinvertebrates that we find living in the creek beds can tell us something about the health of the creek. Certain species are sensitive and can only survive in very clean waters, while other species can tolerate high levels of pollution.

The Estuary Program has been conducting annual bioassessment monitoring for over 20 years. For half of that time, the effort has been made possible by the [Harold J. Miozzi Charitable Trust](#). Their long-term support has been key to the creation of this valuable data set.

While it is a very intensive effort, bioassessment monitoring yields crucial data for assessing trends in watershed health. Our staff are out in the watershed this spring for the 2024 effort, and results will be shared later in the year.



Assessing habitat requires measurements such as water depth, plant cover over the creek, and the size of materials that make up the creek bottom. At some sites, it's best to don protective suits against the abundant poison oak.



Sometimes measuring water depth is no easy task! This is a deep pool on lower Chorro Creek, near South Bay Boulevard.



What we capture in the net can tell us something about the water quality in the creek. This stonefly larva from San Luisito Creek typically indicates good water quality.



To capture creek-dwelling insects, we scrub the rocks and stir up the sediment to dislodge larval stage insects. The current carries the insects into the net.

CLEANUPS AND MARINE LITTER IN THE MORRO BAY ESTUARY

The Estuary Program hosts cleanups year-round to help maintain the health and beauty of Morro Bay. The goal for these events is to remove litter from local beaches, roads, and trails before it enters the estuary or ocean and becomes marine debris.

Marine debris is defined as any persistent, solid material that ends up in the marine environment. This can range from microplastics (microscopic plastic debris) to large items such as abandoned fishing vessels or household appliances. In 2016, an estimated 23 million metric tons of plastic waste entered marine waters from the land, and that doesn't include non-plastic waste such as metal, fabrics, and cigarette butts.

This debris as well as litter on land and in fresh water can negatively impact ecosystems in a variety of ways. Wildlife can become sick, injured, or even killed by ingesting or becoming entangled in marine debris. Litter such as diapers, medical waste, or pet poop contains bacteria that can contaminate waterways and harm animals and humans. And the presence of litter on coastlines is an unpleasant sight and deters people from visiting or recreating. Keeping Morro Bay's waters and surrounding lands clean is central to our local economy and the health of residents, visitors, and wildlife.

The Estuary Program is hosting two cleanups this summer on June 8th for World Ocean Day and on July 5th. Morro Bay is a popular destination for visitors on the Fourth of July. Since increased tourism can mean increased litter, this cleanup on the day after the holiday helps to reduce the amount of debris that could impact our waterways and oceans. You can learn more about these events and register for free at [MBNEP.eventbrite.com](https://www.mbnep.org/mbnep/eventbrite.com).



Even if you aren't able to attend our events, we encourage you to do your own cleanup at a local beach, trail, or even in your own neighborhood. Every action counts, no matter how small!



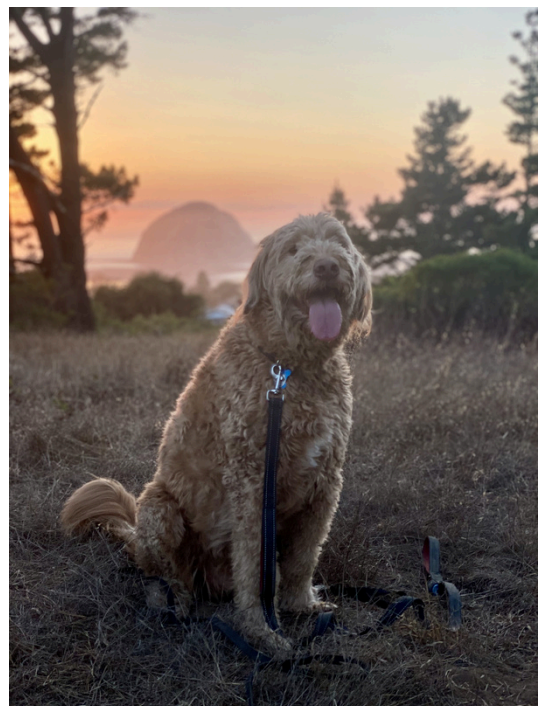
During our Earth Day cleanup on April 20th, volunteers picked up nearly 30 pounds of trash from around Morro Rock!



Mutts for the Bay Corner

Spring has arrived on the Central Coast! As local and visiting dog owners come out to the area to recreate and enjoy the beauty of spring in Morro Bay, the Mutts for the Bay Program is here to help you and your pup be more eco-friendly. Here are some quick tips for eco-friendly dog ownership:

- Pick up after your dog: Bring your own poop bags or grab a bag from one of our 36 dispensers around Morro Bay and Los Osos to be prepared.
- Pack it out: After you pick up after your dog, make sure that bag comes with you and makes its way to the trash! There are many ways you can attach a used poop bag to your dog's leash so you can be hands-free until you can get to a trash can.
- Stay on trail: There are many sensitive habitats on the Central Coast, so it is important for you and your pup to stay on the trail. This helps reduce erosion and trampling of vegetation and nests, while minimizing unwanted wildlife encounters.
- Spring cleaning: When you tackle your spring cleaning, take a look at your dog toys, beds, and treats. Consider donating anything that your dog doesn't use to your local shelter (like Woods Humane Society or the SLO County Animal Shelter!).



Mutts for the Bay has a new look! Our new Mutts for the Bay logo was created with the graphic designer Rayco Design and features some of our distinct Morro Bay landmarks. Drop by our table at an upcoming event to get one of our new stickers and check out our eco-friendly dog ownership educational materials!

Blog Recap

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

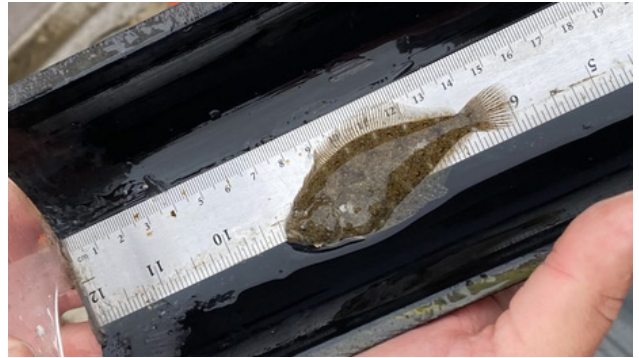


DECEMBER FIELD UPDATES: A TALE OF TWO EELGRASS BEDS

January 12, 2024

Read up on the field work we did in December to monitor eelgrass beds in the estuary.

[CLICK TO READ](#)

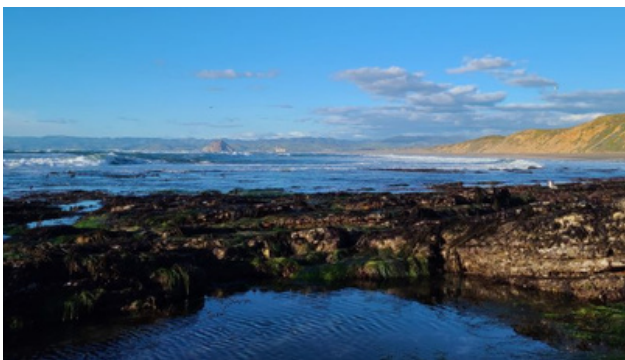


WILDLIFE SPOTLIGHT: HABITAT SPECIALIST FISH OF THE MORRO BAY ESTUARY

February 2, 2024

Check out this blog to learn about habitat specialist fish and their specific adaptations that help them thrive in the Morro Bay estuary.

[CLICK TO READ](#)



SPECIES HIGHLIGHT: LESSER KNOWN TIDEPOOL SPECIES ON THE CENTRAL COAST

March 1, 2024

The Central Coast has many interesting and unique tidepool species. Check out this blog to learn more!

[CLICK TO READ](#)



EDUCATION HIGHLIGHT: WATERSHED WEEK WITH ONE COOL EARTH

March 22, 2024

Read up on the collaborative education week the Estuary Program did with One Cool Earth this spring in schools across SLO County.

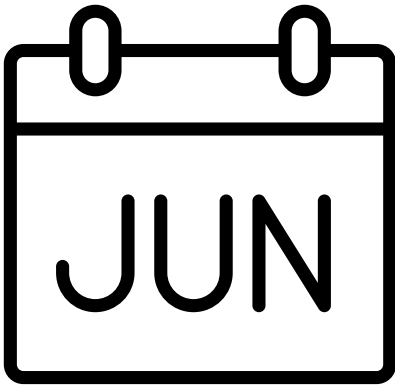
[CLICK TO READ](#)

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!

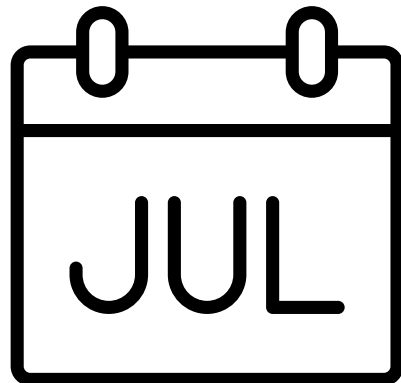
JUNE EVENTS



- June 1st:** Morro Bay Farmers Market on Main Street, 2-5 p.m.
- June 5th:** Storytime at Arroyo Grande Library, 10:30-11:30 a.m.
- June 6th:** Downtown SLO Farmers Market, 6-9 p.m.
- June 8th:** World Oceans Day Cleanup at Morro Rock, 10 a.m. -Noon.
- June 12th:** Snapshot Cal Coast Tidepool Bioblitz at Hazard Reef (Montana de Oro State Park), 9:30-11:30 a.m.
- June 25th:** Morro Bay Library Storytime, 10:30-11:30 a.m.
- June 26th:** Science on Tap at Babydudes in Morro Bay, 6-7:30p.m.

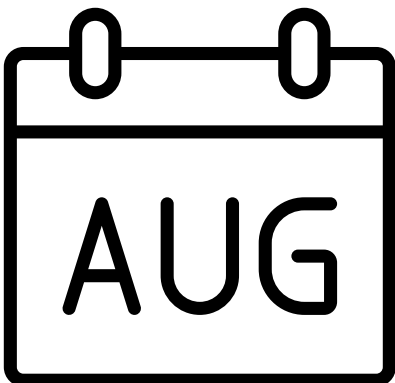
JULY EVENTS

- July 5th:** Beach cleanup at Morro Rock, 10 a.m. -Noon.



AUGUST EVENTS

- August 1st:** Los Osos Library Storytime,- 10-11 a.m.
- August 6th:** SLO Library Storytime,- 10-11 a.m.



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

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