



DIRECTOR'S REPORT

March 15, 2023

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

State of the Estuary Conference

Planning is underway for the 19th Biennial State of the Estuary Conference! While we typically hold the conference in odd years, our search for a suitable venue for an in-person event has pushed the timing of the conference into spring of 2024 (tentatively March 12-13). We are working on assembling the Conference Steering Committee which will convene soon. Please reach out to Liz Juvera (liz.juvera@sfestuary.org) if you would like to join the Steering Committee and/or if you have suggestions for others we should consider inviting to join.

SF Bay Restoration Authority – TOURS!



Join the Governing Board of the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority for a series of tours of restoration projects in 2023. Four tours will cover the North, East, West, and South Bay regions and will be open to the public. The first tour will cover North Bay projects and will likely be

scheduled for late March or early April.

Visit the [SFBRA website](https://www.sfbra.org/) for the latest tour announcements.

BIL Year 1 Projects Underway

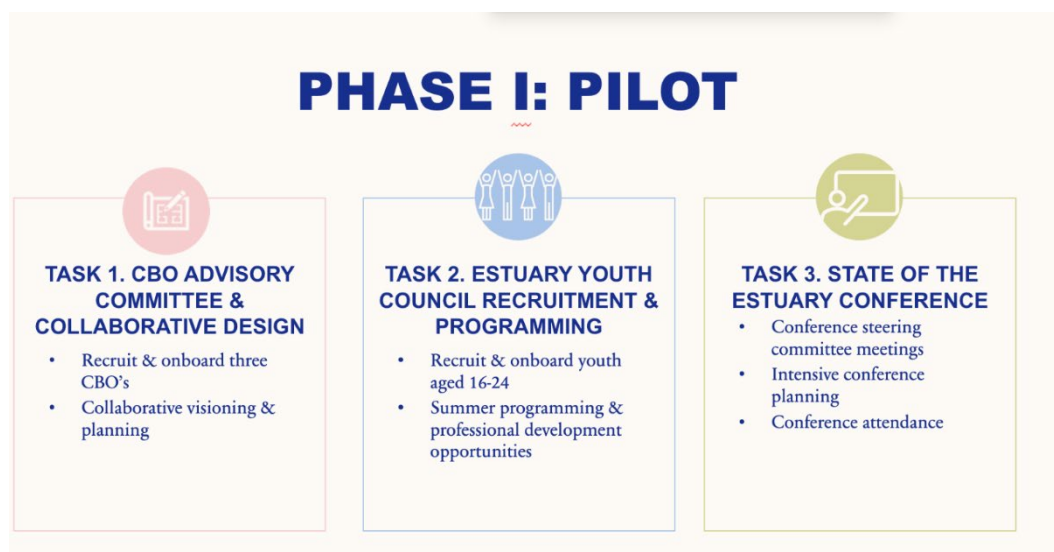
Our workplan and budget for Year 1 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) funds was approved and we received the award from US EPA in January, launching our BIL Program in earnest. Year 1 activities include: 1) advancing adaptation planning in the San Leandro Operational Landscape Unit (OLU); 2) continued research on horizontal levees at the Oro Loma Living Laboratory; 3) establishing an internal Equity Team within SFEP and

developing an Equity Implementation Plan; and 4) producing an Outreach and Communications Program Plan.

The workplan and budget for Year 2 funds is due to US EPA by June 1, 2023, as is the BIL Equity Strategy. We look forward to a more in depth briefing and discussion of the BIL program at the May IC meeting.

Estuary Youth Council

Thanks to generous funding from the Tides Foundation and leveraging BIL funding for staff support, we are in the process of creating a pilot Estuary Youth Council. The Estuary Youth Council has two main goals: 1) Provide professional development opportunities to emerging environmental leaders from underrepresented and underserved communities in the San Francisco Estuary watershed; and 2) Advise environmental managers, planners, and decision-makers by filling existing knowledge gaps of youth-centered perspectives, concerns, and priorities in the restoration and adaptation of the San Francisco Estuary. SFEP staff will work with three community-based organizations - Nuestra Casa (East Palo Alto), Mycelium Youth Network (Oakland), and Restore the Delta (Stockton) - to co-develop and co-implement a pilot of the Estuary Youth Council, which will consist of a cohort of nine youth. Funding agreements for each organization are currently being finalized and completed, and meetings will start shortly thereafter.



TrUW – Equity Workshop for Wastewater Practitioners

Wastewater agencies around the Bay Area are designing and implementing innovative technologies and strategies to address sea level rise and other climate change adaptation, including nature-based solutions. As their work moves beyond the walls of the treatment plant, wastewater agencies are finding that more community interaction and engagement is needed than ever before. These new practices require different skills, including training to support wastewater agencies in adopting best practices for racial and social justice.

As part of the Transforming Urban Waters (TrUW) Initiative, SFEP partnered with the Bay Area Clean Water Agencies and Calm Waters Group to host a workshop on social justice and racial equity for wastewater practitioners. This workshop aimed to help wastewater agency staff build vocabulary and knowledge around social justice and racial equity and facilitated their development of draft action plans for equity and community engagement. The workshop also served as a kick-off convening for a cohort of wastewater practitioners working on these issues within their agencies who can continue to communicate lessons learned, challenges, and successes with each other.

COMPLETED PROJECTS

Lower Walnut Creek Restoration Project (IRWM)

We are closing out the grant funds that were provided for a portion of the Lower Walnut Creek Restoration Project through a State of California Department of Water Resources (DWR) Proposition 1 Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Implementation Grant. The project was awarded approximately \$1,400,000 from DWR through the Partnership in 2019 for part of the larger restoration plan at the site.

The Contra Costa County Flood Control District is undertaking a large restoration project on Lower Walnut Creek and has completed the first year of work. That work consisted of the heavy civil work such as excavation, levee construction, access road construction, and fill placement. It also included the installation of a temporary irrigation system to support the 31,000 native container plants as shown below along with the poppies and goldfields that are starting to bloom.



Palo Alto Horizontal Levee Pilot Project

The Palo Alto Horizontal Levee project advanced with the closeout of a \$500,000 grant from the State Coastal Conservancy. The [Palo Alto Horizontal Levee Pilot \(PAHLP\) project](#) is a novel and innovative initiative that links nature-based solutions to achieve habitat improvement, public access, flood protection and water quality improvement.



Funds from the State Coastal Conservancy supported finalization 60% Design and submittal of permit applications to the US Army Corps of Engineers and SF Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board. In addition, the project team hosted multiple stakeholder workshops focused on equity and balancing

habitat protection and public access at the project location.

Next steps for the Palo Alto Horizontal Levee will include completion of permit applications with expected permit issuance later in 2023. Later this year, Save The Bay will begin propagation of plant for restoration. Save The Bay will also support outreach activities, including community planting days. The project team is also advancing design. Funding is soon to be secured for construction in Summer 2024.

We want to thank the State Coastal Conservancy for their partnership and support of this innovative project. This project only advanced due to the leadership and vision of the City of Palo Alto. Additional partners involved include Save The Bay, US Environmental Protection Agency and Environmental Science Associates.

COMMUNICATIONS

Estuary News Magazine

As you may recall, at your November meeting, the IC approved terminating ESTUARY News Magazine in its current form as of June 2023. The final issue will be released in late March and will cover 30 years of restoration in the Estuary. Both PDF and hard copies will be available so watch your inbox or keep an eye on the [Estuary News website](#)!

In the meantime, please join us during the March 15th meeting in celebrating 30 years of in-depth professional coverage of the Estuary and, specifically, in honoring the role of founding editor of Estuary News and long-term editor-in-chief, Ariel Rubissow Okamoto.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

MTC/ABAG New Executive Director



Congratulations to Andrew Fremier who has been named the next MTC/ABAG Executive Director following the departure of Therese McMillan. Andy has been with MTC since 2005 and was currently serving as the Deputy Executive Director for Operations. Prior to MTC, he served as the Chief Deputy District Director for CalTrans District 4. Of course

you all also know Andy as a member of our Implementation Committee, a role he has served in since the consolidation of the staffs of MTC and ABAG in 2017. The Partnership looks forward to continuing to support cross-agency collaborations focused on various topics including climate resilience and green stormwater infrastructure under Andy's leadership.

2022 Coastal and Estuarine Summit

SFEP had a good showing at the Restore America's Estuaries 2022 Summit held in December in New Orleans. Diana Fu, James Muller, and Alex Thomsen all gave presentations at the Summit on various topics including social media as an engagement tool, disadvantaged community and Tribal engagement, and the Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program.



NEP Meeting in DC

After a three-year hiatus due to COVID-19, Darcie Luce and I are finally headed back to Washington, DC in March. We will be attending a series of National Estuary Program meetings hosted by US EPA as well as visiting the offices of the fourteen Representatives and two Senators within our planning area.

Staff Changes



Welcome to the Partnership's newest staff member, Ben Botkin!

Ben joined the Partnership in January as the Priority Conservation Area (PCA) Program Coordinator. Ben worked most recently at WRA, Inc. as a Senior Open Space Planner, but previous to that he was with ABAG/MTC's Regional Planning Program for many years, primarily within the Regional Trails Program where he managed the Water Trail. In his new role with the Partnership, he will manage all currently active grants under previous PCA grant rounds. He will also work with ABAG/MTC to improve the PCA planning framework and program to incorporate a wider range of policy considerations including climate resilience, equity, and access to parks and open space, and will develop and manage a revised PCA Grant Program for future grant rounds. Finally, Ben will assist with implementation of the Estuary Blueprint including climate resilience and conservation actions.

We are pleased to welcome TWO California Sea Grant Fellows to SFEP this year!

Will Geiken is a recent alumnus of the Bren School of Environmental Science and Management at UC Santa Barbara, where he studied the Economics and Politics of the Environment with a focus in Strategic Environmental Communication and Media. Will recently worked as an Assistant Planner for the Santa Clara County Parks and Recreation Countywide Trails Program to help promote the development of regional trails for county residents. Will's focus at the Partnership includes helping coordinate the State of the Estuary Conference and the inaugural Estuary Youth Council, among other projects.



Taylor Pantiga has a B.S. in Biological Sciences from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, and will receive a M.S. in Interdisciplinary Marine and Estuarine Sciences from San Francisco State University (SFSU) in spring 2023. For her thesis project, Taylor studied seagrass wasting disease and population genetics in eelgrass beds in the San Francisco Bay Area. Prior to her graduate studies at SFSU, she worked with several state and federal agencies to conserve endangered plants, birds, and salmonids along California's coast. She will be assisting SFEP with the Wetlands and Regional Monitoring Program, in addition to other projects.

Photo Corner!

SFEP staff have had fun lately engaging in an internal monthly photo contest, initiated and hosted by our Section Administrator, Sarina Seaton. Thanks, Sarina!



January's Contest Theme was "Sunrise/Sunset" and the winner was Liz Juvera who submitted this beautiful photo of her hometown of Pacifica.

February's prize went to Ben Botkin for his stunning submittal for the month's "Night Photography" theme.

