



DIRECTOR'S REPORT

May 6, 2026

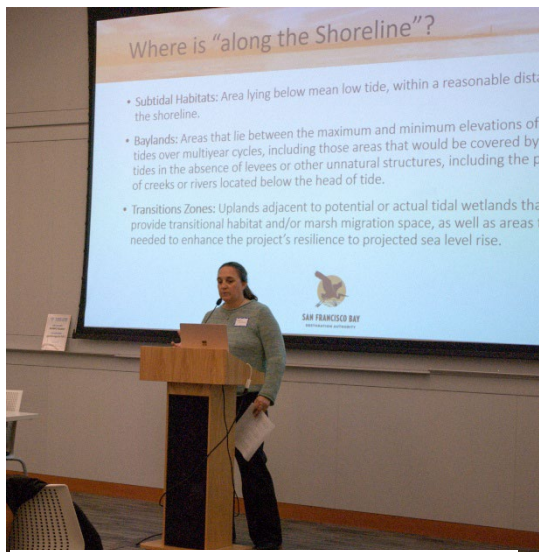
PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

San Francisco Climate Week

Last Week, the San Francisco Estuary Partnership partnered up with a trove of regional agencies to host a series of free events for [San Francisco Climate Week](#), the largest climate summit in the country.

Several Estuary Partnership staff played important roles in coordinating, speaking, or facilitating events across Earth Week. Caitlin Sweeney participated on a panel hosted by ICF that explores how regional collaboration is reshaping resilience planning and implementation across California.

At the Bay Area Metro Center, Karen McDowell facilitated and coordinated a session highlighting San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority Projects, James Muller facilitated a session spotlighting how collaboration and innovation are shaping coastal resilience through the lens of the SR 37 project, and Ben Botkin was scheduled as one of the key speakers on the walking tour, which aimed to showcase



Karen McDowell (photo by Alexis Gabriel)

adaptive infrastructure along San Francisco's waterfront spaces (which was unfortunately cancelled due to weather). Alexis Gabriel served as the communications lead, developing the marketing and outreach strategy for the series. Overall, the series registered over 1,000 participants. Read more about the event on the [ABAG news page](#).

Palo Alto Horizontal Levee Elected Officials Tour

We had great attendance on a beautiful day for a tour of the Palo Alto Horizontal Levee specifically for elected officials on April 24th. Organized by Save the Bay, in collaboration with the Estuary Partnership, Nuestra Casa, and the City of Palo Alto, the tour provided a great opportunity to cultivate champions for nature-based shoreline solutions by highlight the innovative multi-benefit Palo Alto project. The tour drew over 30 elected officials and staff from the local, regional, state and federal levels and included an opportunity to get a little dirty with some invasive plant removals!



San Mateo County Supervisor Lisa Gauthier, Napa County Supervisor Belia Ramos, Valley Water Board Member Shiloh Ballard, and Assemblymember Marc Bermon demonstrating the “International Sign for Horizontal Levees.” (Photo by Chris Hunter, Chief of Staff for Supervisor Gauthier)

Shoreline Visitation Data Needs Workshop

On April 10th, the Estuary Partnership hosted an interactive workshop on San Francisco Estuary shoreline visitation data needs. This workshop was designed to inform the Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program’s (WRMP) approach to monitoring wetland visitation across the Bay Area in addition to other SFEP work on the shoreline. The event brought together scientists, agency partners,

land managers, shoreline planners, and community-focused organizations to explore how information about shoreline visitation can best support decision-making related to wetland restoration, public access, shoreline adaptation planning, and habitat management. Through presentations, small group discussions, and hands-on activities, participants shared their perspectives on the most important and useful types of shoreline visitation data to collect—such as visitor demographics, activities, timing patterns, and access modes—and where long-term monitoring would be most valuable. The SFEP team is synthesizing input from the workshop into a report on shoreline visitation data needs, to be released in summer 2026.

Upcoming Meeting on Groundwater Rise & Contaminated Sites

The Transforming Shorelines Collaborative is hosting an in-person meeting on Groundwater Rise and Contaminated Sites on May 29th, 9:30-12:30, at the Bay Area Metro Center in San Francisco. The meeting will provide a forum to learn about and discuss the latest data modeling and analysis about groundwater rise and contamination vectors in the Bay Area, and will highlight efforts underway in Richmond and East Palo Alto to address groundwater rise and contaminated sites.

Please use [this link](#) to register. Spaces are limited but if you cannot make it in person and would like to listen remotely you may register and request a zoom link.

COMMUNICATIONS

State of the Estuary Conference Website Archive

Want to revisit the 2025 State of the Estuary Conference? The conference archive is available on SFEP's website (<https://www.sfestuary.org/soe-archive/>) and includes links to the program, recordings of keynote addresses and performances, poster abstracts, and news coverage of the conference. Check out the newly released video of conference highlights at <https://www.sfestuary.org/soe-videos/>.

2026 SFEP Fact Sheet Released

The attached 2026 Estuary Partnership fact sheet is finalized and ready for distribution at meetings, conferences, workshops, etc. Please let Alexis Gabriel

(alexis.gabriel@sfestuary.org) know if you would like printed copies of the fact sheet for distribution at meetings or events.

SFEP Staff Leads National Communications Network

The Estuary Partnership's Communications Manager, Alexis Gabriel, has been selected to serve on the leadership team of the Association of National Estuary Program Communicators Network. She is a founding member who helped restructure the newly member-led group. The network's goal is to advance skill-sharing, develop and share resources, and codify best practices among communications staff from the 28 NEPs located across the country.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

FY27 Appropriations Update

We had strong bipartisan support from the House and Senate with the circulation of a "Dear Colleague" letter supporting funding of the National Estuary Program at its currently authorized level of \$1 million per NEP. We received 75 signatures on the House letter and 22 signatures on the Senate letter.

The FY 27 President's Budget that was released includes significant cuts to EPA overall, though the more detailed congressional justification document released by EPA maintains relatively level funding for the National Estuary Program.

NEP Reauthorization

The House passed reauthorization of the National Estuary Program (which is set to expire this year) not once, but twice! Once through the stand alone "ESTUARIES Act" (H.R. 3962), and then again through the passage of the American Water Stewardship Act which included reauthorization language. Now on to the Senate.

IC CHANGES

NOAA Office for Coastal Management

Sarah Van der Schalie, Acting West Coast Regional Manager, is now serving as the primary representative for the NOAA Office for Coastal Management, following the retirement of Becky Smyth last year.

East Bay Regional Parks District

Matt Graul, Acting Assistant General Manager/Stewardship Development, is the new primary representative for the East Bay Regional Parks District, filling a spot that has long been vacant.

STAFF CHANGES

Introducing our 2025 California Sea Grant Fellows



Kierstin Thigpen recently completed her master's degree in Marine Science Aquaculture from Moss Landing Marine Laboratories, focusing her masters on purple urchin ranching as a tool to restore California Kelp Forests. Kiersten also volunteers at the Marine Mammal Center, rehabilitating seals and sea lions and monitoring cetacean populations in the Monterey and

San Francisco Bays. Kiersten will be supporting the Priority Conservation Area Grant Program.



Michelle Dan recently completed her master's degree in oceanography at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, where she developed eDNA tools to investigate open-ocean biodiversity. She has also conducted research with the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History and worked with Indigenous communities in Panama and Kenya on

community-centered conservation research. Michelle will be supporting the Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program.



Partnership in Action



Photo: Joey Kotfica

The San Francisco Estuary Partnership and its partners are committed to a future that envisions and works towards a healthy San Francisco Bay and Delta.



We take an innovative and forward-looking approach, embracing new technologies and strategies, including nature-based solutions, to improve the resilience of our shoreline communities.



We catalyze regional work toward our collective vision of a healthy Estuary.



We work collaboratively with partners across disciplines and sectors to restore the Estuary's unique habitat, improve water quality, reduce flood risks, and secure green spaces for generations to enjoy.



We leverage federal funding with millions of dollars in state and local funds for on-the-ground projects that directly improve the lives of communities across the region.



Photo: Mark Jones

OUR IMPACT

The Estuary Partnership manages over **\$100 MILLION** in planning, design, implementation, and community capacity-building projects, enacting the 25 priority actions outlined in our regional 2022 Estuary Blueprint (sfestuary.org/estuary-blueprint/).

2026 Project and Program Highlights

Regional Programs

Regional Resilience Technical Assistance Program

- Expanded adaptation and resilience technical assistance for local governments and communities.
- Improves regional coordination and increases the pace and scale of on-the-ground adaptation efforts.

The State of Our Estuary

- Provides the most comprehensive regional assessment of the health of the San Francisco Estuary.
- Updated status and trends of over 20 indicators that track problems and progress to inform solutions.

Priority Conservation Area Grant Program

- Funds projects within areas nominated by local jurisdictions.
- Protects and enhances the region's natural and agricultural lands, improves outdoor access and urban greening, and builds resiliency.

Estuary Youth Council

- Provides professional development opportunities for emerging environmental leaders.
- Advises environmental professionals by filling knowledge gaps with youth-centered perspectives.

Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program

- Improves wetland restoration and enhances the cost-effectiveness of permit-driven monitoring.
- Advances wetland education and workforce development.

Place-Based Projects

State Route 37 Ecological Enhancement

- Advancing ecological benefits while protecting critical transportation links from flooding.

North Richmond Watershed Restoration

- Implementing critically needed community-led restoration in the lower part of the watershed.

East Bay Crescent Shoreline Adaptation Planning

- Developing coordinated, collaborative multi-jurisdictional sea level rise adaptation plans.

Horizontal Levees

- Implementing multi-benefit levee projects with wastewater treatment plants to reduce nutrients, increase habitat, and protect against flooding.



About the San Francisco Estuary Partnership



Photo: Natasha Daniels

The San Francisco Estuary Partnership was established in 1988 under the Clean Water Act as part of the National Estuary Program, a place-based non-regulatory program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency created to protect and restore estuaries of national significance. The Estuary Partnership, hosted locally by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), is a regional program with a federal mandate to protect and restore the water quality and ecological integrity of the San Francisco Estuary from the Golden Gate to the Sacramento Delta.

The Estuary Partnership leads the Estuary Blueprint, a comprehensive, collaborative strategy for the Estuary's future. The Estuary Partnership convenes agencies and organizations in the region and catalyzes regional work toward this collective vision of a healthy Estuary. We work hand-in-hand with communities, funders, and other key partners to collaborate, innovate, and adapt to the dynamic needs of the Estuary and its watershed communities.



Partnership in Action

Thank you for your support. Your support allows us to elevate the Estuary Partnership's work to enhance the lives of the over 8 million residents across our 12 counties.

San Francisco Estuary Partnership

email: communications@sfestuary.org | web: sfestuary.org | social: [@sfestuarypartnership](https://www.instagram.com/sfestuarypartnership)