



DIRECTOR'S REPORT

August 19, 2026

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Wildcat Creek Project Underway

The Restoring Wildcat Creek: Community-Led Watershed Health Update and Priority Project Implementation project, planned and championed by public and community partners, has been working to 1) create a watershed-scale restoration action plan, 2) implement critically needed restoration in the lower part of the watershed, and 3) create design plans to address the gaps in the Wildcat Creek Trail that prevent communities in North Richmond from accessing the shoreline and the planned improvements there.

SFEP and the funded project partners (The Watershed Project, Urban Tilth, Contra Costa County Flood Control District) selected a consultant, Mithun, to join the team and begin work on the watershed restoration action plan and the trail designs with a kickoff meeting in August. The project will begin restoration activities in the winter of 2026 and anticipates hauling 20,000+ cubic yards of sediment to West County Wastewater facilities to be stored for reuse in advance of the North Richmond Living Levee construction, expected in 3-4 years.

Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program - Lidar Survey

In collaboration with the Delta Stewardship Council, California Department of Water Resources, and other partners, the Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program completed the first estuary-wide Lidar survey of the San Francisco Bay-Delta. The dataset provides high-resolution elevation data across 1.25 million acres of Baylands and is publicly accessible. The SFEP Communications team and WRMP staff supported outreach and promotion of an August 5th public webinar highlighting the project and available resources. Local jurisdictions are already using the data to identify vulnerable locations to tidal flooding in an effort to develop readily available temporary flood fighting measures for implementation this winter. Updates on the project can be found at <https://www.wrmp.org/estuarywide-2025-lidar-collaboration/>

PCA Projects Selected

In June, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission approved the fourth round of PCA grant awards to protect and manage high-value conservation lands and to expand urban greening in communities. Totalling \$8 million, this investment supports 16 projects across all nine Bay



Image Credit: Student-developed design for urban greening at Castlemont High School in Oakland. PCA grant funding will advance community-driven environmental stewardship that incorporates student experiential training and neighborhood-based conversations to develop a plan that optimizes access and urban greening in East Oakland.

Area counties that advance Blueprint goals and reflect a strong regional commitment to:

- Protecting and restoring habitats and improving climate resilience
- Expanding access to parks, trails, and shorelines
- Strengthening connections between communities and agricultural lands

The PCA Grant Program – administered by the San Francisco Estuary Partnership – was initiated by MTC in collaboration with the State Coastal Conservancy. Since 2013, the PCA Grant Program has provided over \$46 million to protect and enhance the region's natural and agricultural lands, improve outdoor access and urban greening, and build regional climate resiliency across Bay Area communities.

EYC Year 3 Kickoff

We have officially launched the third cohort of the Estuary Youth Council (EYC). For its 2026 cohort year, EYC welcomed eight youth who will participate in a six-month program offering hands-on learning experiences, small-group mentorship, and professional



Photo Credits: Lidia Daneshvar

development. So far this year, youth have visited India Basin Waterfront Park in San Francisco's Bayview-Hunter's Point neighborhood, the salt marshes of Alviso in San Jose, and the Hayward Shoreline Interpretive Center in Union City's Eden Landing. From now until December, EYC youth will meet once a month at a new waterfront site to learn about local ecology and environmental history, and to meet organizations and individuals working to improve the

health of the Estuary. The program will culminate in the completion and presentation of original capstone projects that will address a critical environmental challenge faced by the San Francisco Estuary. Read more: [EYC Returns for Year 3 - Bay Area Metro Blog](#)

Palo Alto Horizontal Levee Nearing Completion

Construction of the Palo Alto Horizontal Levee is expected to be completed this month! The horizontal levee will use treated wastewater to replace the freshwater that used to come from local creeks but has since been cut off due to flood control channelization and urban development. The treated wastewater will provide underground irrigation to support the diverse habitats that will be restored on the horizontal levee. Project goals include:

- Improving habitats
- Adapting to sea level rise
- Maintaining a low-impact trail for recreational access
- Providing polishing treatment to treated wastewater
- Maintain an area to integrate a future flood control levee with the horizontal levee, if needed



Photo Credit: Natalie Rossi

The Estuary Partnership/ABAG partnered closely with the City of Palo Alto on this effort under the [Adaptation and Resilience Technical Assistance \(ARTA\)](#) program. Key partners and their roles are listed below: Lead Implementer: [City of Palo Alto](#); Project Manager/Implementation Support: San Francisco Estuary Partnership; Funders: [US Environmental Protection Agency](#), [CA State Coastal Conservancy](#); Community Engagement and Monitoring Partners: [Nuestra Casa](#), [CSU Channel Islands](#), [US Geological Survey](#); Lead Designers: [Environmental Science Associates](#) and [HDR](#); Construction Management: [Zoon Engineering](#); Construction: [Corcus Construction](#); Planting: [Save](#)

[The Bay](#). We will be excited to share more updates on project completion soon. Please contact Heidi Nutters, Assistant Director, Estuary Partnership (heidi.nutters@sfestuary.org) with questions.

Artist in Residence Program

SFEP is launching its first Artist-in-Residence (AIR) pilot program as an innovative approach to advancing public engagement around climate adaptation and sea level rise. Building on the Partnership's shoreline resilience work, the "Rising Seas" residency reflects SFEP's recognition that adapting to climate change requires not only technical and engineering

solutions, but also opportunities for communities to engage with these challenges on a cultural and human level. The program will provide a platform for artists to explore and communicate the physical, emotional, cultural, and ecological impacts of rising seas, helping broaden the conversation around climate resilience throughout the Estuary.

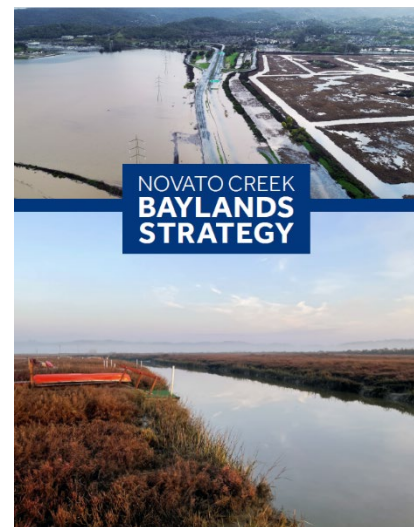
To establish the program, SFEP secured foundational funding and partnered with ABG Art Group LLC to co-design and co-facilitate the residency. Inspired by lessons learned through the Partnership's collaboration with the City of Emeryville on Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plans, SFEP is expanding its climate communication and public engagement toolkit by integrating the arts into its resilience work. The pilot program is intended to foster more inclusive, community-centered approaches to adaptation by creating opportunities for reflection, dialogue, and storytelling that complement traditional planning processes. Applications are open through September 1, 2026, with the residency running from October through December 2026 and a public exhibition planned for January and February 2027. Lessons learned from the pilot will help inform future opportunities to incorporate arts-based engagement into SFEP's regional resilience initiatives.

COMPLETED PROJECTS

Novato Creek Baylands Strategy

The Novato Creek Baylands Strategy (NCBS) was [published](#) on June 30, 2026, and is the third baylands strategy developed since 2020 ([Sonoma Creek, 2020](#); [Petaluma River, 2023](#)). The NCBS was developed through a collaborative planning effort led by the San Francisco Estuary Partnership and supported by the San Francisco Estuary Institute, Marin County Flood Control, Marin Audubon Society, ESA and Far Western. The NCBS describes a long-term vision for restoring more than 4,000 acres of diked baylands in the Novato Creek Operational Landscape Unit. The project combined scientific analysis, flood modeling, cultural resource assessments, and extensive engagement with landowners, agencies, infrastructure operators, Tribal representatives, and other interested parties to identify restoration opportunities that align ecological, community, and infrastructure needs.

The strategy evaluated a range of restoration alternatives and used hydraulic modeling to assess their effects on habitat, flood risk, and sea level rise resilience. Results indicate that



reconnecting former wetlands to tidal action can restore ecosystem processes while reducing flood elevations and improving the performance of the watershed's flood management system. The planning effort also identified near-term implementation opportunities, including restoration of the Sprayfields area, and outlined key infrastructure, funding, and coordination needs to support future project delivery.

The strategy provides a roadmap for one of the Bay Area's largest remaining tidal wetland restoration opportunities. Its vision is to create a connected landscape of tidal marshes, mudflats, channels, and upland transition habitats that support sensitive species, improve resilience to flooding and sea level rise, and provide long-term benefits for surrounding communities and critical infrastructure, including State Route 37.

NEW FUNDING

East Bay Crescent Subregional Vulnerability Assessment and Shoreline Adaptation Planning - \$2,240,000 (Ocean Protection Council)

The Estuary Partnership has received funding from the Ocean Protection Council to advance sea level rise adaptation along the shorelines of Albany, Berkeley, Emeryville, and a portion of Oakland. The cities comprise the Alameda County portion of the East Bay Crescent Operational Landscape Unit. Despite the region's vulnerability, no comprehensive, climate-informed shoreline adaptation plan exists for this subregion, and existing planning efforts utilize different sea level rise scenarios and timeframes. Engaging a host of partners along the East Bay Crescent shoreline, the project will work towards a subregional vulnerability assessment, as well as coordinated but distinct Subregional Shoreline Adaptation Plans for the cities of Albany, Berkeley, and Emeryville that adhere to BCDC's Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plan (RSAP) guidelines.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

Director Recruitment

The search for the next Director of the San Francisco Estuary Partnership is still underway. Luisa Valiela and Keith Lichten have served on panels for candidate interviews and will provide a brief update at the IC meeting.

FY 27 Appropriations Update

Congress has not yet released final FY27 funding levels for the National Estuary Program. The house has included \$850,000 per NEP in their appropriations with a \$2.5 million competitive grant program available to the NEPs. The Senate Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill and accompanying report language remain pending, and final funding will ultimately be determined through House-Senate negotiations as part of the broader FY27 appropriations process. Given the limited legislative calendar before the midterm elections, there is an increased likelihood that Congress may rely on a continuing resolution beyond September 30 while appropriations negotiations continue. All indications are that the NEP programs will ultimately be appropriated at consistent levels.

NEP Reauthorization

The National Estuary Program reauthorization effort advanced significantly in July when the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee approved the ESTUARIES Act as part of the Senate's Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) package, bringing the legislation one step closer to enactment. The committee-approved bill includes language supporting consideration of the Mississippi Sound for future inclusion in the National Estuary Program while maintaining ongoing discussions about ensuring that any program expansion is accompanied by sufficient funding and does not diminish resources for existing estuaries. Reauthorization now awaits consideration by the full Senate and eventual reconciliation with House-passed provisions, with WRDA remaining the primary legislative vehicle for completing NEP reauthorization during the 119th Congress.

STAFF CHANGES

Data Analytics and Outreach Coordinator – Mei Collins

We are happy to welcome Mei Collins to SFEP as the inaugural Data Analytics and Outreach Coordinator for the Wetlands Regional Monitoring Program! Mei will support data collection, analysis, and visualization focused on the human dimensions of wetlands and develop targeted science communication products for diverse audiences. She will also coordinate wetland



education, workforce development, and community engagement in collaboration with local organizations, Tribes, and educational institutions.

Mei earned a Master of City Planning degree from UC Berkeley and a bachelor's degree in environmental science and public policy from Harvard University. She has previously worked in environmental consulting and in various capacities with community organizations, federal and state agencies, and environmental NGOs. We're thrilled to have Mei as part of the WRMP team!

Environmental Planner – Natalie Rossi



We are excited to welcome Natalie Rossi to our staff as an Environmental Planner on a temporary assignment. Natalie joined SFEP as a SeaGrant Fellow in March 2025. During her Fellowship, she provided crucial program support for the Wetland Regional Monitoring Program and Adaptation and Resilience Technical Assistance Program. Moving forward, Natalie will provide assistance to the ARTA team on initiation of the Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plans for the Cities of Emeryville, Berkeley and Albany and will provide ongoing program leadership on the Transforming Shorelines Collaborative. Since Natalie is an avid painter and artist, you can also look forward to seeing some of her artwork in SFEP's upcoming communications work. Welcome Natalie!

Interns and Mentees

The Estuary Partnership was fortunate to have six interns this summer! This is the largest number of interns the Estuary Partnership has ever had, and our team is incredibly grateful for their time and talent supporting our projects and programs. We are pleased to have the Summer Mentees join us past their initial six-week stint into the winter.

MTC Summer Mentees



Jazmin Martinez recently graduated from UC Berkeley's College of Environmental Design with a Master's in City Planning and is supporting the Restoring Wildcat Creek project through a combination of watershed planning, grant development, community engagement, and resilience-focused research. Jazmin is supporting and being mentored by Liz Juvera. Her primary responsibilities include researching and pursuing supplemental funding opportunities, reviewing and providing input on updates to the Wildcat Creek

Watershed Restoration Action Plan (Re-WRAP), and helping identify data, GIS, and climate resilience needs to strengthen long-term restoration planning.



Katy Vigil-McClanahan is a graduate student at UC Davis and is studying Environmental Policy and Management. Katy is supporting the development of two regional, charrette-style workshops focused on advancing multi-benefit coastal adaptation and nature-based solutions for sea level rise in the San Francisco Bay Area. Katy is supporting and being mentored by Graham Prentice. The work centers on two key topics: governance challenges related to the implementation, operations, and maintenance of nature-based adaptation projects, and strategies for addressing groundwater rise and contamination at vulnerable shoreline sites.



Ronnie Rodriguez is an undergraduate student at City College of San Francisco and is studying Geography and Geographic Information Systems. Ronnie is supporting the Estuary Youth Council, the Estuary Partnership's youth leadership and environmental education program, through a combination of program operations, communications, and stakeholder engagement activities. His work includes helping coordinate monthly in-person and virtual events, preparing participant materials and communications, managing event logistics, maintaining program records, and providing administrative support to ensure successful program delivery.



Lidia Daneshvar is an undergraduate student at the University of San Francisco and is studying Finance and Marketing. Lidia is supporting the San Francisco Estuary Partnership's Communications Team through a mix of digital communications, marketing, branding, and content development activities. Her work focuses on developing social media content, supporting newsletter production, maintaining communications resources, organizing digital assets, and helping promote key initiatives such as the Artist-in-Residence Program.

California State University COAST Interns



Ezra Conley-Proia and **Gabi Mendez** joined the Estuary Partnership over the summer to support the WRMP program under the guidance of Alex Thomsen. Ezra and Gabi spent much of their time out in the field collecting a pilot set of standardized data on amenities presence and condition at publicly accessible



wetland sites to support the WRMP People and Wetlands working group. They visited 74 sites around the Bay Area to collect data on amenities and public use that will be used to address questions about how public access around wetlands varies around the region, and to inform adaptive management of publicly accessible wetland sites. In addition to conducting fieldwork and developing communications materials about the public access amenities project, Ezra and Gabi also developed a StoryMap about regional distribution of contaminants in fish to support angler safety. They concluded their internship in early August, and the Estuary Partnership is incredibly thankful for their time and effort.