

California Marine Life Protection Act Initiative Some “Land Side” Programs of Interest to the Central Coast MLPA Process

The MLPA Initiative is assembling information on governmental and non-governmental programs whose landside activities may have a significant link to the effectiveness of existing or future marine protected areas along the central coast. Brief descriptions of the kinds of programs being profiled follow. This sample focuses on water quality.

Federal Governmental Programs

The Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary Integrated Monitoring Network (SIMoN) is a consortium of more than 40 institutions conducting monitoring in Monterey Bay. The sanctuary also operates a Water Quality Protection Program, which is a partnership of federal, state, and local agencies and private groups that have developed and implemented plans for monitoring and addressing polluted runoff from urban, agricultural, rural and marina/boating sources.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is conducting a pilot environmental monitoring and assessment program aimed at assessing the condition of estuaries along the west coast. Among other programs, it manages the National Estuary Program (see below).

State Governmental Programs

The State Water Resources Control Board provides grants and loans for wastewater management, agricultural drainage management, citizen monitoring and watershed projects. The state board and nine regional boards work with the U.S. Department of Defense on the investigation and remediation of water quality issues at military facilities.

The regional water quality control boards (RWQCBs) issue permits and set conditions for the discharge of materials into coastal waters from point and nonpoint sources, and manage funds collected to mitigate unavoidable impacts. The Central Coast RWQCB has developed a basin plan that identifies beneficial uses, requires the implementation of plans to protect beneficial uses and sets water quality objectives and criteria.

The California Coastal Commission, together with coastal cities and counties, plans and regulates the use of land and water in the coastal zone. Development activities in the coastal zone generally require a permit from the Coastal Commission or a local government that has an approved local coastal program.

The state Nonpoint Source Pollution Interagency Coordinating Committee involves 28 agencies in implementing California's federally-approved nonpoint source pollution control program by promoting a watershed approach and by providing a forum for resolving policy and programmatic conflicts.

Besides commenting on proposed projects that may alter habitat of endangered and threatened species, the Department of Fish and Game also manages permits for alteration of streambeds and other water bodies if the alterations may adversely affect fish and wildlife.

Governmental Programs Implemented Locally

The California Coastal Commission's Critical Coastal Areas Program fosters collaboration among local stakeholders and government agencies to focus resources and efforts to reduce polluted runoff in coastal zone watersheds; priority areas along the central coast include the San Lorenzo River, Soquel Lagoon, Watsonville Slough, Elkhorn Slough, Old Salinas River, Salinas River, Pacific Grove Marine Gardens, and San Luis Obispo Creek.

Under the Morro Bay National Estuary Program, which is part of a national EPA program, a multi-stakeholder group is implementing a comprehensive conservation and management plan to address sedimentation, nutrient overloading, bacterial pollution, habitat loss, reduced freshwater flow, loss of steelhead, and toxic and heavy metal pollution in the Morro Bay estuary and watershed.

Local, state, and federal agencies throughout the region sponsor volunteer monitoring programs with a strong focus on water quality. These include the State Water Resources Control Board, Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Research Reserve, Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, and Morro Bay National Estuary Program.

Non-governmental Programs

Dozens of local, community-based voluntary organizations participate in efforts to address issues in coastal watersheds in the five counties along the central coast. Many such organizations also support volunteer water-quality monitoring programs in harbors and along beaches.