

Morro Bay National Estuary Program Community Grant

Final Report for SeaLife Stewards Project 2016

The SeaLife Stewards Project started with the recruitment of 25 kayak and land-based volunteers for Morro Bay with the goal of reducing disturbance to otters, harbor seals, sea lions and seabirds while increasing public awareness of marine wildlife and respectful viewing. The volunteers in kayaks were on the water a total of 42 days, and welcomed 1,065 visitors before they encountered wildlife and engaged them with information about the animals, encouraging them to observe from a safe distance. They also collected data on human-caused wildlife disturbances observing a disturbance rate of 0.16 disturbances per hours on the water. There were 50 contacts that the SeaLife Stewards made that prevented imminent disturbance of marine wildlife on the water. Other benefits of the first year of the program were keeping kayakers safe, being eyes and ears on the water for Harbor Patrol, reaching 842 visitors on land in Morro Bay during Sea Otter Awareness Week, and creating partners in protection around the bay and beyond. The SeaLife Stewards are off to a great start working towards the long-range goal of creating shared norms for local community for no-impact wildlife viewing and shared goals with Partners in Protection throughout Morro Bay.



Objectives Met in the First Season:

1. Trained and launched 25 safe and knowledgeable volunteers, including college students, which were on the water 42 days on weekends during spring and summer 2016.
2. Educated 1,065 visitors on the water and 842 visitors on land about marine wildlife and safe interactions.
3. Captured baseline data through citizen science documenting 0.16 disturbances of wildlife per hour in the first season with the future goal of comparing the disturbance rate and the number of people contacted for each future season that volunteers are on the water.
4. Created Partners in Protection with the local on-the-water-businesses and agencies including Morro Bay National Estuary Program, Morro Bay Harbor Department, United States Coast Guard, and the CA Department of Fish and Wildlife.



Action Plan Summary:

The SeaLife Stewards program supported the following MBNEP Action Plans:

Best Management Practice - Boating- BMP-9

SeaLife Stewards provided safe wildlife viewing tips and reasons why not to disturb wildlife to boaters along with species identification and interpretive facts about the estuary, and wildlife to 1,065 people on the water.

Ecosystem Conservation and Restoration – Special Status Species and Recovery Plan -ECR-14

SeaLife Stewards protected special status species including southern sea otters and brown pelicans. SeaLife Stewards provided safe wildlife viewing messages and interpretation of how our actions can save or endanger special status species populations.



Environmentally Sound Estuarine Resource Use – Recreational Uses - USE-1

SeaLife Stewards provided best practices wildlife viewing modeling and proven-effective wildlife viewing etiquette to boaters, kayakers, paddlers, divers, swimmers, and surfers, species identification and interpretation of marine wildlife behavior, along with reasons why disturbance is harmful.

Education & Outreach – Public Education & Outreach - EO1

Visitors on the water in Morro Bay learned from SeaLife Stewards wildlife species identification, clean estuary practices for on the water and at home, and safe wildlife viewing practices on the water for 1,065 people on the water and an additional 842 during Sea Otter Awareness Week.

