CHNEP PEER PROGRAM EVALUATION COMMENTS OF THE SANTA MONICA BAY NEP

Jennifer Hecker, Executive Director, CHNEP

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Addressing Challenges Outlined in 2014 Performance Evaluation

Financial Management

The 2014 Performance Evaluation of the Santa Monica NEP identified that though it had been very successful in raising and leveraging funds, significant amounts were still needed and that new funding mechanisms and opportunities should be explored.

The 2019 Program Evaluation clearly demonstrates on page 5 that the Program is not only leveraging EPA funds from 15:1 to 58:1, but also increasing cash contributions from its Foundation and other non-EPA sources such as the State Bond funding. Additionally, on pages 6-7, there is an excellent summary of new funding sources that were garnered during the review period, as well as fundraising events held to benefit the organization. The diversification and increased funding demonstrated over the last 5 years is responsive to EPA's 2014 PE recommendation in this regard and is a definite strength for this Program.

Outreach and Public Involvement

The 2014 Performance Evaluation also identified several issues regarding public concerns with Program receiving 320 funds, its organizational structure, its public participation process, and its role in the Ballona Wetlands Restoration Project. While the EPA reviewed each of these issues and found no justification, it did recommend the Program clarify its roles and responsibilities on key projects, as well as for its partners to as well. It also encouraged routine communication with public, and public involvement in the implementation of the CCMP to be continued.

The 2019 Program Evaluation on pages 7-8 directly responds with what actions have been taken and are currently underway to address these concerns. Understandably, those pertaining to clarification of respective roles and responsibilities are being addressed through the current CCMP Revision. The efforts to make meeting information more publicly accessible through the Program website shows the Program has been responsive to EPA's 2014 PE recommendation in this regard. If webcasting of key Program meetings is technically feasible and is not already being undertaken, this could be an additional step to increase public involvement and participation that could be potentially considered. Overall, the Program has clearly demonstrated that is successfully educating and engaging the public in its program area.

Supporting information and Documentation

The extensive supporting information and documents provided and outlined in the 2019 SMBNEP Attachments document are more than enough to corroborate their performance measures responses. The 1,500 attachments organized into 42 topical subfolders made it relatively easy to cross-reference any item with its supporting materials. The documentation includes key outputs and deliverables, and substantiated the information provided in their 2019 SMBNEP Work Plan Narrative Report and 2019 SMBNEP Performance Measure Worksheets. There is no additional information or documentation that I need as a reviewer to assess the program's performance.

Work Plan Summary

The 2019 SMBNEP Work Plan Narrative Report narrative adequately describes those elements identified on page 6 of the PE Guidance. Its format follows the NEP Program Evaluation Logic Model in the 2016 Final Program Evaluation Guidance, making it easy to track and follow. The following is a description of how EPA's core elements are addressed in the 2019 SMBNEP Work Plan Narrative Report and on The Bay Foundation website, which are also excellently outlined in the 2019 Program Evaluation: SMBNEP Standardized Performance Measures document as well.

Program Implementation and Reporting: Financial Management

The SMBNEP researches and tracks prospective donors and funding opportunities and their outreach materials contain information regarding acknowledging and soliciting funds. They have a current finance plan and a system of documenting funding activity in detailed internal quarterly financial status reports that The Bay Foundation produces, as well as state match tracking by the State Water Resources Control Board. Non-federal match is tracked in Annual Reports and NEPORT information submitted to the US EPA.

Program Implementation and Reporting: Program Planning and Administration

The SMBNEP is migrating from a 2013 Bay Restoration Plan to a 2018 CCMP Action Plan and now to a full CCMP revision underway. This involves a substantial effort to update and improve program planning and administration, including the aforementioned clarification of roles and responsibilities of the program and its partners in CCMP implementation. The evidence of successful program planning and administration is the fundraising and program achievements, both in this case which are exceptional. The program is fully engaged in developing and implementing the FY2019 SMBNEP Work Plan (available in their online "Library" under SMBNEP products), building and maintaining partnerships, and creating a clear and transparent decision-making process that includes the public.

Program Implementation and Reporting: Outreach and Public Involvement

The SMBNEP Watershed Advisory Committee facilitates public involvement and comment into the program and its work plan. In addition to their comprehensive website, the SMBNEP employs a variety of social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and Flickr. Their annual programmatic results are publicly reported on their website in their Annual Reports. An impressive aspect of their outreach is the effort they put into producing public outreach materials in both Spanish and English, as well as into infographics and multi-media formats. The 2019 SMBNEP Work Plan Narrative Report has numerous examples of public outreach and involvement activities; a truly impressive amount done overall in this regard.

Ecosystem Status and Trends: Research

The SMBNEP conducts an extensive array of research initiatives, together with their partners. With regards to emerging contaminants, a state-wide panel of experts was convened that developed monitoring requirements. They also engaged local fishing industry members to participate in kelp restoration efforts, conducted outreach and education on invasive species, and developed and distributed outreach materials in support of the Boater Education Program. Additionally, they affected

policy change with local ordinances and ultimately state legislation restricting the use of plastic bags and straws, as well as other positive natural resource policies.

Ecosystem Status and Trends: Assessment and Monitoring

The SMBNEP does wide-ranging assessment and monitoring on an array of topics including ocean acidification, water quality, algae blooms, etc. They have a Technical Advisory Committee that ensures the Programmatic work and decisions are rooted in sound science. Their work identifying pathogens has resulted in faster response mechanisms, as well as improved seafood advisories and risk communication mechanisms. The Program extensively uses volunteers to support their efforts, with many opportunities available on their volunteer web page including for "Wetlands Monitoring, Research and Restoration". They also use cutting-edge technologies, such as the R2Deep@ underwater ROV. The internship program trains students, as well as the volunteer program training, improves data collection.

Ecosystem Status and Trends: Reporting

The 2019 SMBNEP Work Plan Narrative Report does an excellent job of outlining the climate change vulnerabilities to their CCMP implementation and their strategies to overcoming those pressures. Additionally, the 2015 State of the Bay report has provided overall conditions, with an anticipated update in 2020. In addition to these periodic large-scale conditions reports, perhaps if they are not already employed already, a web-based GIS data display and reporting site could be used to provide interim updated information, or annually updated conditions fact sheets available on their website.

Perceived strengths

Overall, the SMBNEP exceeded the baseline expectations and achieved many of the performance measures for excellence in the core elements categories. The Program has many strengths in having an obviously competent and sufficiently sized staff to operate and further CCMP implementation successfully. Their partnerships and volunteer base are provided substantial support for programmatic work. They are creating demonstrative results that are achieving their stated goals. Their website and social media campaign is outstanding.

Perceived challenges

Other than the identified climate change related "pressures", I did not perceive any challenges to them continuing to make adequate progress in the implementation of their CCMP. Even those pressures have been thoughtfully reviewed and assessed to ensure that their strategies have been adapted, which I anticipate will be reflected further in their forthcoming CCMP Revision.