

ASSOCIATION OF NATIONAL ESTUARY PROGRAMS



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MORRO BAY

Morro Bay is located on California's south-central coast south of San Jose. It supports the most significant wetland system in the area, large tourism and commercial fishing industries, oyster farming, and other business and recreational interests. The area is a critical resource to the fishing and recreational boating industries.

FACTS ABOUT THE ESTUARY

- Over 200 species of birds spend a part of their life cycle in the estuary, making it a top spot in the nation for bird watching.
- The bay provides habitat for a number of threatened and endangered species and supports a rich eelgrass resource.
- In 1993, over 100 commercial fishing boats contributed an ex-vessel value of \$7 million to the area's economy.
- Sport fishing annually accounts for over \$1 million in gross revenues.
- Between 50 and 300 transient commercial vessels use the harbor and facilities each year.

HEALTH OF THE ESTUARY

- Increased sedimentation has resulted in a 25 percent loss in tidal volume over the last 100 years.
- Sedimentation is also resulting in the loss of mudflat and open water habitat and other resources dependent upon specific water depths and salinity concentrations.
- High fecal coliform levels have closed portions of Morro Bay's oyster beds.
- High levels of nutrients are entering the estuary from tributary creeks and seepage from on-site septic systems.
- Decreases in freshwater flow have reduced flushing in the bay and increased pollutant concentrations.
- Steelhead trout populations have declined due to reductions in freshwater flow, high water temperatures, low dissolved oxygen levels, sedimentation, and migration barriers.
- Key habitats have been lost or degraded due to water quality impairments.
- Eelgrass beds have declined due to shoaling.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE ESTUARY PROGRAM

- Completed a Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan containing 60 actions designed to address priority problems.
- Monitored water quality and quantity since 1995 with the help of hundreds of local volunteers.
- Through the Morro Bay Watershed Enhancement Plan, implemented 235 best management practices that have prevented more than 172,000 tons of soil erosion.
- Installed pollution prevention equipment at a boat haul-out facility.
- Removed 64 cubic yards of "junk," numerous illegal moorings and various sunken vessels decreasing potential toxic pollutants.

Oyster Chowder

3 bacon slices, chopped
2 cups chopped leeks
(white and pale green
parts only)
2 tbl chopped fresh thyme
1 tbl all purpose flour
1-1/2 cups bottled clam juice
1-1/2 cups half and half
1 8-oz jar oysters, drained,
juices reserved, oysters cut into
1/2-inch pieces
1 10-oz russet potato, peeled,
cut into 1/2-inch pieces

SautØ bacon in large heavy saucepan over medium-high heat until crisp and brown, about 3 minutes. Transfer 1 tablespoon of bacon to small bowl; reserve rest for garnish.

Add leeks and thyme to pan; sautØ until leeks begin to soften, about 3 minutes. Whisk in flour. Gradually whisk in clam juice, half and half, and reserved oyster juices. Add potato and bring to boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer until potato is tender, about 10 minutes. Add oysters and simmer, uncovered, until oysters are heated through and just firm, about 3 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

Ladle chowder into bowls. Sprinkle with reserved bacon and serve. Accompany the chowder with saltines or Crown Pilot crackers.

Serves two; can be doubled.