

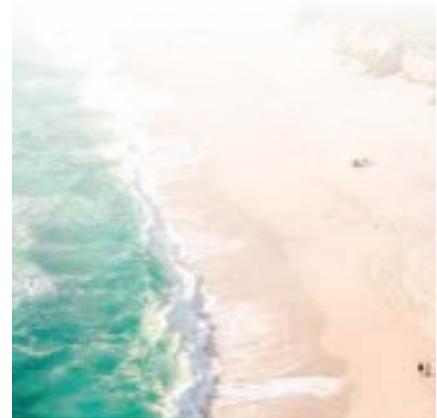


OCEAN PROTECTION COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

February 27, 2020 – June 19, 2020

Providing an update on outcomes and accomplishments since the previous OPC Meeting.



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INTRODUCTION

The Ocean Protection Council (OPC) approved a bold, far-reaching Strategic Plan to Protect California's Coast and Ocean in February of this year. The world has changed dramatically since then. The COVID-19 global pandemic has resulted in over 8 million cases and 450 thousand deaths worldwide. Here in California, those numbers are over 150 thousand cases and over 5,000 deaths. The tragic impacts of the pandemic in terms of human life and families have been devastating. The pandemic also has led to an unprecedented transformation of the workplace where the vast majority of state employees have been teleworking for three months. OPC is no different. During this time, we have continued to work with our state agency, NGO and university partners to keep projects going during the pandemic. We even worked with 17 agencies to develop Sea-Level Rise Principles to guide and align California coastal resilience planning, decision making, and projects. Providing flexibility to our project partners to keep people working has never been more critical during these challenging economic times. As you can see by the agenda for the June OPC meeting, we are accelerating our rate of project funding to move aggressively towards strategic plan implementation and to keep California's marine professionals working.

California, the U.S. and the world have suffered devastating consequences due to the global pandemic, but that does not mean that the nation's other critical issues have disappeared. Far from it. We are living in a defining moment in our shared history. We are witnessing an uprising and solidarity across the country in defense of Black lives that is resulting in the confrontation of centuries of systemic racism that still exists and even thrives in our nation. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed many health care access inequities that Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) face every day in the U.S. In addition, we see systemic inequities and racism in school performance, incarcerated populations, affordable housing and homeless population demographics, diversity in the workplace – especially in leadership positions, and in BIPOC communities adjacent to pollution sources and with limited access to California's coast. The events of the last month must lead to a harsh and honest assessment of what we can do in the marine science and policy community to overcome systemic racism in the workplace and along our coast. Advancing equity across ocean and coastal policies and actions is one of the four pillars of our strategic plan. OPC has committed to working with California's BIPOC communities and leaders to develop both a Tribal Consultation and Engagement Policy and an Environmental Justice and Social Equity Plan. However, we recognize that these plans are clearly not enough when we look at the demographics of the marine science and policy community. Action is needed now. In the coming months, OPC will develop strong, far-reaching actions grounded in racial justice and inclusive of diverse voices representative of the state of California and the communities we serve. We look forward to hearing from you and discussing your recommendations as soon as possible.

UPDATES BY STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL

Goal 1: Safeguard Coastal and Marine Ecosystems and Communities in the Face of Climate Change • Goal 2: Advance Equity Across Ocean and Coastal Policies and Actions • Goal 3: Enhance Coastal and Marine Biodiversity • Goal 4: Support Ocean Health through a Sustainable Blue Economy

GOAL 1: SAFEGUARD COASTAL AND MARINE ECOSYSTEMS AND COMMUNITIES IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Sea-Level Rise Coordination

OPC continues to coordinate sea-level rise efforts amongst state agencies. Secretary Crowfoot convened executive leadership from 17 state agencies to develop a shared [sea-level rise principles](#) around best available science, partnerships, alignment, communications, local support, and coastal resilience projects. These principles, which were formally endorsed by Secretary Crowfoot, Secretary Blumenfeld and Controller Betty Yee and recently adopted by the State Lands Commission and Coastal Commission, will enable California to scale up its coastal resiliency efforts through aligned strategies that create consistent, efficient decision-making processes and actions, and improve collaboration across state, local, tribal, and federal partners. On May 21, OPC hosted a workshop for over 120 participants from state agency leadership and program staff to discuss implementation of the principles and next steps.

Sea-Level Rise Information (AB 2516) Survey Released

OPC continues to fulfill its [AB 2516](#) mandate to compile and disseminate information on statewide sea level rise planning efforts. Surveys were sent out to required entities (public agencies, airports,

utilities, and ports) on Monday June 15, and submissions collected from the survey will be housed on the Integrated Climate Adaptation and Resilience (ICARP) [Adaptation Clearinghouse](#), which is managed by the Office of Planning and Research.

Leveraging Federal Funding for Coastal Resiliency

OPC has provided non-federal match for three projects funded through the competitive National Coastal Resiliency Fund. The National Coastal Resilience Fund invests in projects that restore, increase and strengthen natural infrastructure to protect coastal communities while also enhancing habitats for fish and wildlife. OPC funding has helped support three grantees and their projects: The Humboldt County Department of Public Works, “Natural Shoreline Infrastructure in Humboldt Bay - Intertidal Coastal Marsh Restoration and Transportation Corridor Protection” (\$125,000); The National Audubon Society, “Advancing Nature-Based Adaptation Solutions in Marin County: Transforming Marin City’s Urban Wetland” (\$199,999); and The San Simeon Community Services District, “San Simeon Coastal, Estuarine, and Riparian Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Plan” (\$125,000).

Development of Prop 68 Funding Solicitations

OPC staff is currently developing two competitive solicitations for our designated Prop 68 funding. These Request for Proposals are focused on natural infrastructure projects to adapt to sea-level rise, and on ocean acidification and hypoxia monitoring and research. The planned release for these solicitations is late summer 2020.

GOAL 2: ADVANCE EQUITY ACROSS OCEAN AND COASTAL POLICIES AND ACTIONS

See Goal 3 below for details regarding tribal engagement.

GOAL 3: ENHANCE COASTAL AND MARINE BIODIVERSITY

Restoring and Protecting California’s Kelp Ecosystems

On February 26, OPC [authorized](#) funding for removal of purple urchins by commercial fishermen, as well as associated ecological monitoring, in support of kelp forest recovery on California’s north coast. OPC, CDFW, and Reef Check California have finalized the project’s experimental design and have developed protocols that will allow restoration and monitoring work to proceed safely in the context of COVID-19. Initial monitoring work has begun and commercial divers will begin removals later this month.

See [Item 8](#) for a staff recommendation regarding a unique partnership between OPC, CDFW, and California Sea Grant that meets the urgency of the kelp crisis by partnering with California’s leading kelp forest researchers to create a statewide Kelp Recovery Research Program.

Advancing Tribal Priorities in Marine Protected Areas Management

The Marine Protected Areas (MPA) Statewide Leadership Team is made up of members from state and federal government, tribes, local community experts, and philanthropy who work together to successfully implement the state’s MPA Management Program. The efforts of the Leadership Team are guided by a three-year Work Plan and significant progress has begun to advance Work Plan priorities focused on tribal needs and interests, with the creation of a Tribal Representatives Working Group. The Working Group will address topics such as creating consistent messaging for tribal content in outreach materials, applying the Fish and Game Commission’s co-management

definition to MPA management, and developing a tribal customary use definition and pathways for how this definition could be incorporated into MPA Management.

See [Item 6a](#) for a staff recommendation regarding the establishment of a Tribal Marine Stewards Network pilot program, which will be focused on MPA monitoring and based on shared priorities between Tribes and the State. This program will significantly advance California's efforts to support indigenous stewardship and adopt meaningful co-management measures.

Marine Protected Areas Outreach and Education Small Grants Program Announces Awards

In collaboration with Coastal Quest, OPC is pleased to announce funding awards to 10 organizations throughout the state for the MPA Outreach and Education Small Grants Program, totaling approximately \$745,135. This funding will support outreach and education projects to help increase compliance with MPA regulations statewide. Funding for the MPA Outreach and Education Small Grants Program was [approved by OPC](#) at its meeting in May 2019 and is funded by OPC's Once-Through Cooling (OTC) Interim Mitigation Program. Using private funds, Coastal Quest is also providing awards for three additional outreach and education projects that will also provide benefits to disadvantaged communities.

International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Green List

OPC and CDFW continue to make progress in their effort to add California's MPA network to the [IUCN Green List](#) of Protected and Conserved Areas. The Expert Assessment Group for the Green List (EAGL), a diverse group that includes representatives from a variety of ocean stakeholder communities, held a virtual meeting with OPC and CDFW on June 11, 2020 that resulted in a clear path forward for evaluation work, including regional site visits and stakeholder interviews, over the next several months. The EAGL will reconvene in October 2020.

Red Abalone Management Strategies Integration

The red abalone Administrative Team [report](#) was finalized on April 17; this final report incorporates feedback from the Fish and Game Commission Marine Resources Committee (MRC) based on discussion during the March 17, 2020 MRC meeting.

Protecting Whales and Sea Turtles & Ensuring Thriving Fisheries

See [Item 7](#) for a staff recommendation regarding four projects in alignment with OPC's investment [strategy](#) to reduce the risk of entanglement in California fishing gear, approved at OPC's November 13, 2019 meeting.

Drift Gillnet Transition Program

Following OPC's February 26 [authorization](#) of \$1 million to fund the implementation of the drift gillnet program; the grant agreement between OPC and the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, the program's designated fiscal agent, was finalized on June 11.

Plastic Pollution Steering Committee

OPC staff has re-convened the interagency California's Plastic Pollution Steering Committee (PPSC) to increase collaboration among state agencies working to address plastic pollution. Like other OPC staff-facilitated interagency coordination groups, the PPSC is currently working on developing a charter, which will describe the process of how the group will work together, and a work plan, which will create a roadmap for the PPSC's activities.

California Ocean Litter Prevention Strategy Implementation Webinar

This summer, OPC staff planned to host an in-person workshop focused on implementation of the California Ocean Litter Prevention Strategy. To protect public health during the COVID-19 pandemic, the in-person workshop has been postponed and replaced with a webinar on June 24 and 25. The webinar will provide: an opportunity for stakeholders to define successful implementation of the Litter Strategy; address impacts of COVID-19 on the plastic pollution prevention movement; and the address need for diversity and inclusion in these efforts going forward.

California Conservation Genomics Project

Spearheaded by Assemblymember Bloom, UCLA is leading the state-funded, UC-wide, California Conservation Genomics Project that will result in the full genomes and landscape genomics for over 150 species across California. A major component of the project is the landscape genomics on marine species. The marine species effort will cover 28 species ranging from Giant Kelp and Bull Kelp to Dungeness Crab, Spiny Lobster, California Halibut and Market Squid. The results of the project will be critical for a myriad of species and biodiversity management decisions, and should be available in 2022 and 2023.

GOAL 4: SUPPORT OCEAN HEALTH THROUGH A SUSTAINABLE BLUE ECONOMY

Dungeness Crab Task Force (DCTF) Elections

DCTF 2020 commercial fishing elections are currently underway. Ballots have been tallied, and commercial fishing representatives have been contacted by OPC and CDFW staff to confirm willingness to serve on the DCTF, with results anticipated to be announced at the end of June. See the [DCTF website](#) for more details.

Aquaculture

OPC will be coordinating with CDFW, FGC, Coastal Commission and other state agency leaders to develop Aquaculture Principles to guide sustainable aquaculture in California. At OPC's September 17, 2020 meeting, OPC staff anticipate recommending a project to support the development of the statewide Aquaculture Action Plan, in alignment with Target 4.2.1 of OPC's Strategic Plan.

Marine Renewable Energy

OPC staff participated in the U.S. Floating Offshore Wind Delegation to Scotland from March 2 through March 6, 2020. The event was convened by the U.K. government specifically for the benefit of government officials from California, Maine, New York, North Carolina, and Oregon where floating offshore wind development is currently under consideration. The four-day program explored the differences between floating and fixed bottom offshore wind projects, both advantages and challenges, and the implications for policy planners including environmental agencies.

PROJECTS APPROVED BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S DELEGATED AUTHORITY

This section provides a summary of projects approved between February 2020 and June 2020 through the OPC Executive Director's delegated authority.

Grantee	Project	Amount	Description
Ocean Science Trust	OPC Science Advisory Team Working Group on Microplastics	\$133,445	To support the OPC microplastics strategy, Ocean Science Trust will convene and facilitate an OPC Science Advisory Team working group to develop and provide: a risk assessment framework for microplastic pollution in California along with scientific guidance to assist the state in understanding the source, fate and transport, toxicological impacts, marine species impacts, and ecosystem and human health impacts of microplastics.
The Nature Conservancy	Reducing the Risk of Marine Life Entanglements through Accessible and Scalable Science	\$97,547	This project will support an Entanglement Science Workshop in late summer/early fall 2020 to inform development of whale and sea turtle entanglement mitigation strategies and adaptive management of entanglement risk within US West Coast fixed-gear fisheries. The project will also explore opportunities to improve the accessibility and utility of information streams required to assess and mitigate entanglement risk.
Humboldt County Department of Public Works	Natural Shoreline Infrastructure in Humboldt Bay - Intertidal Coastal Marsh Restoration and Transportation Corridor Protection	\$125,000	This project will perform site characterization and prepare preliminary design utilizing tidal benches or similar natural infrastructure techniques to help protect a critical transportation corridor along Humboldt Bay from flood hazards. The purpose of the project is to restore and enhance intertidal coastal marsh habitat for native plants and wildlife, protect transportation infrastructure, and beneficially reuse sediment. The project area includes a highly vulnerable segment of Highway 101 along with railroad infrastructure and the future Humboldt Bay Trail. OPC funding represents non-federal match for this National Coastal Resilience Fund project.

National Audubon Society	Advancing Nature-Based Adaptation Solutions in Marin County: Transforming Marin City’s Urban Wetland	\$199,999	This project will develop a publicly-informed and community-supported conceptual plan for the restoration of an urban wetland in Marin City. This project will use nature-based adaptation solutions to increase local resilience to sea-level rise through reconnected hydrology between a bay-side city and the bay waters, restoration of functional subtidal and intertidal wetland elevations, and native plant installations. This innovative partnership between a high-capacity national conservation organization (Audubon) and a local, grassroots NGO with deep community roots (Shore Up Marin) will provide co-benefits including community engagement and youth education in climate resiliency land management. OPC funding represents non-federal match for this National Coastal Resilience Fund project.
San Simeon Community Services District	San Simeon Coastal, Estuarine, and Riparian Habitat Restoration and Enhancement Plan	\$125,000	This project will develop a habitat restoration and enhancement plan for coastal blufftop, estuarine, and riparian habitats in San Simeon including relocation of the San Simeon Wastewater Treatment Plant (design and planning), to reestablish approximately 1.7 acres of coastal natural habitat and minimize impacts from sea level rise and related coastal hazards within San Simeon. OPC funding represents non-federal match for this National Coastal Resilience Fund project.

PERSONNEL NOTES

Oceane Ringuette. On June 1, Oceane began her summer internship in OPC’s climate change program. She is a current graduate student at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies working towards her Master’s Degree in International Environmental Policy, with an emphasis on Ocean and Coastal Resource Management. Before graduate school, Oceane completed an AmeriCorps CivicSpark fellowship at the City of San Leandro working on climate action planning and community outreach. Oceane has also worked at the Aquarium of the Bay where she taught visitors and students about marine conservation. She received her undergraduate degree from UC Davis in Marine and Coastal Science.



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