



Achieving 30x30 in California's Coastal Waters

Background

In October 2020, Governor Newsom issued the Nature-Based Solutions Executive Order N-82-20, advancing biodiversity conservation as an Administration priority and elevating the role of nature in the fight against climate change. As part of this Executive Order, California committed to the goal of conserving 30% of our lands and coastal waters by 2030 (the “30x30” initiative).

In April 2022, the California Natural Resources Agency released its [*Pathways to 30x30*](#) document, which defines conservation for the purposes of the state’s 30x30 initiative, and details strategies and opportunities for achieving 30x30.

According to *Pathways*, land and coastal water areas are considered conserved if they meet the following definition:

“Land and coastal water areas that are durably protected and managed to sustain functional ecosystems, both intact and restored, and the diversity of life that they support.”

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The first element of the definition of conserved relates to **durability**. *Pathways to 30x30* states that “durably protected and managed areas” encompass:

1. **Areas under government ownership or control, primarily designated to protect species and their habitats.**
2. **Areas under perpetual easements that protect species and their habitats.**
3. **Areas with species and habitat protection designations that have gone through a formal rulemaking or other enforceable decision-making process not subject to simple reversal.**

For the purposes of 30x30 in coastal waters, the durability of most areas being evaluated will fall under #3. Areas “not subject to simple reversal” are those that were designated through a formal rulemaking or regulatory process, with public review and input, that would require another rulemaking or regulatory process to change or eliminate the designation.

The **second element** of the definition of conserved relates to **conservation outcomes**. In order to be considered conserved, an area must provide **ecosystem-level benefits**. This also means that areas are subject to ongoing monitoring and management to ensure conservation objectives are met.

Currently, only California’s statewide network of marine protected areas (MPAs), which covers 16% of state waters, meets both elements of the definition of conservation. However, MPAs are not the only way to protect coastal and ocean biodiversity, and OPC is pursuing action on multiple fronts to conserve an additional half a million acres of coastal waters by 2030.



Approach

The Ocean Protection Council (OPC) is leading the state’s effort to achieve 30x30 in coastal waters. As detailed in *Pathways to 30x30*, our approach will involve evaluating current threats to biodiversity and identifying appropriate actions to address those threats and strengthen biodiversity protections.

We are advancing four key strategies to achieve 30x30 in coastal waters:

1. **Adaptively managing our state's MPA**

network. The state's MPA network, which covers 16% of state waters, meets the definition of conserved as MPAs were designed to safeguard ecosystem function and health, are durably protected, and have already shown positive outcomes for biodiversity.

Adaptively managing California's MPAs to ensure they continue to provide strong protections for coastal and marine biodiversity, especially in the face of climate change, is a key component of achieving the 30x30 target. As the state completes the first Decadal Management Review of the MPA network, future changes to MPAs (e.g., boundary or regulation changes) would occur through the MPA adaptive management process. Such changes would need to be science-based and community-driven and would be implemented by the California Fish and Game Commission and California Department of Fish and Wildlife to better meet the goals of the Marine Life Protection Act. **There is not a separate process to expand existing or create new MPAs to achieve the 30x30 goals.**

2. **Enhancing conservation in National Marine**

Sanctuaries. California is home to four National Marine Sanctuaries (NMSs), three of which cover almost 41% of state waters: Greater Farallones NMS, Monterey Bay NMS, and Channel Islands NMS. California's NMSs were established to

conserve unique natural and cultural resources and include areas of exceptionally high biodiversity. While Sanctuaries provide important conservation benefits for marine life and habitats, each Sanctuary has different regulations and policies that will need to be assessed to determine whether they meet the *Pathways'* definition of conserved.

OPC is working closely with federal partners to identify threats to Sanctuary resources (e.g., water quality, whale ship strikes, etc.) and opportunities to address these threats through strengthened biodiversity protections. One specific aspect of this strategy includes OPC's current collaboration with the Greater Farallones NMS over the next year to align their management plan update with the state's 30x30 efforts for coastal waters.

3. **Supporting tribally led conservation through Indigenous Marine Stewardship**

Areas. Tribal communities have been stewards of California's coastal resources since time immemorial, and the state has much to learn from their experience and



traditional knowledge. The creation and implementation of Indigenous Marine Stewardship Areas (IMSAs), as outlined in the *Pathways'* strategy, will support biodiversity priorities shared between tribes and the state, such as the protection of culturally important habitats and species. IMSAs would be a novel type of protection in California waters. OPC is in the early stages of developing policies to support this concept and looks forward to working in partnership with tribes to understand priorities for 30x30 and the tribal vision for IMSAs.

4. Exploring the role of Other Spatial Management Measures in California's Coastal Waters.

California's coastal waters include a range of spatial management measures beyond the MPA network and National Marine Sanctuaries, including areas created to protect water quality or maintain sustainable fisheries. Understanding the extent to which these spatial management areas are durable and provide ecosystem-level benefits

that meet the definition of a 30x30 conserved area is a top priority for OPC; however, the first step is having a comprehensive inventory of these spatial management measures in state waters which OPC is currently completing. This inventory includes areas of water quality protection, fisheries management, habitat and species management, research and restoration, recreation and regulated access and military use. The final inventory will be shared publicly to solicit feedback and ensure it represents an accurate and comprehensive list. Following inventory completion, OPC will initiate an evaluation of these measures through the creation of a scientific working group to determine the long-term durability and extent to which biodiversity benefits are provided by each area. The working group will provide technical guidance in translating the *Pathways'* definition of conservation into an objective standard/set of evaluation criteria for inclusion, with a focus on critical elements needed for spatial management measures to meet the definition of a 30x30 conserved area.

Commitment to Collaboration

OPC is committed to advancing equity and ensuring that all Californians are well represented in our 30x30 initiative. This includes meaningful engagement with California Native American tribes, communities burdened by environmental and social injustice, conservation organizations, fishermen, and others as we move forward towards conserving 30% of coastal waters by 2030.

If you are interested in talking with us, please email
30x30coastalwaters@resources.ca.gov to set up a meeting.