



Achieving 30x30 in California's Coastal Waters

Background

In October 2020, Governor Newsom issued 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**. For the purposes of 30x30 in coastal waters, the durability of most areas being evaluated will fall under areas “not subject to simple reversal,” meaning 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 **biodiversity benefits**. This also means that areas are subject to ongoing monitoring and management to ensure conservation objectives are met.

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. Following 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 target.

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 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. OPC, in collaboration with the California Natural Resources Agency, is engaging in early consultation on priorities related to tribal stewardship such as access, co-management, and ancestral land return. Feedback received during consultation will inform OPC's approach to conceptualizing and implementing IMSAs in collaboration with California Native American tribal partners.

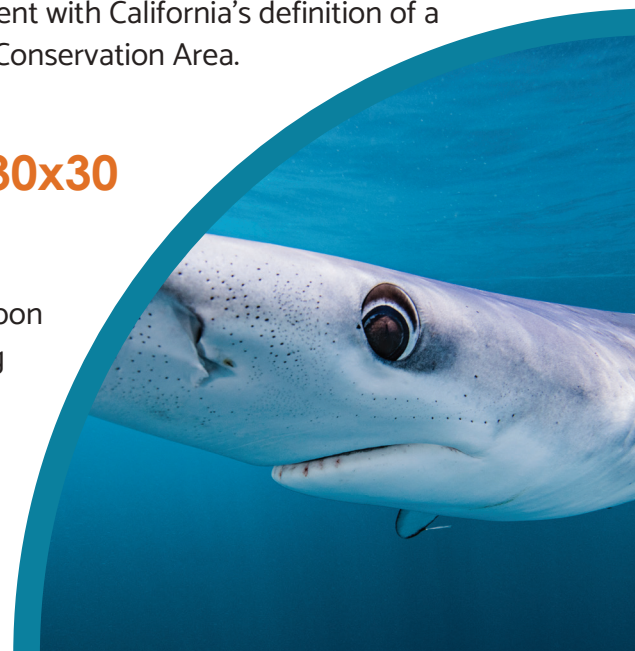
4. Exploring the Role of Other Marine Managed Areas in California's Coastal Waters.

California's coastal waters include a diverse range of marine managed areas 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 marine managed areas are durable and provide biodiversity benefits that meet the definition of a 30x30 conserved area is a top priority for OPC. OPC created a comprehensive inventory of the various marine managed areas within California, which 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 was shared with the public to solicit feedback and ensure it represents an accurate and comprehensive list. Following inventory completion, OPC partnered with the California Ocean Science Trust to convene a 30x30 Technical Advisory Panel. The panel worked to translate policy objectives for 30x30 Conservation Areas – such as durability, effective management, and biodiversity benefits into a clear and objective framework for transparent decision-making regarding what types and levels of marine protection are consistent with California's definition of a 30x30 Conservation Area.

Draft Decision-Making Framework for 30x30 in Coastal Waters

The resulting ***draft decision-making framework*** (Figure 1) builds upon international, science-based guidance and is world-leading in setting an ambitious standard for marine protection and conservation. Simultaneously, the framework recognizes that biodiversity conservation and sustainable, well-managed use of marine ecosystems are not mutually exclusive.



Moving forward, the framework will support identification of potential new conservation measures to address major threats to biodiversity in coastal waters, to be designed and implemented in partnership with state and federal agency partners, California Native American tribes, coastal communities, conservation organizations, and fishing communities.

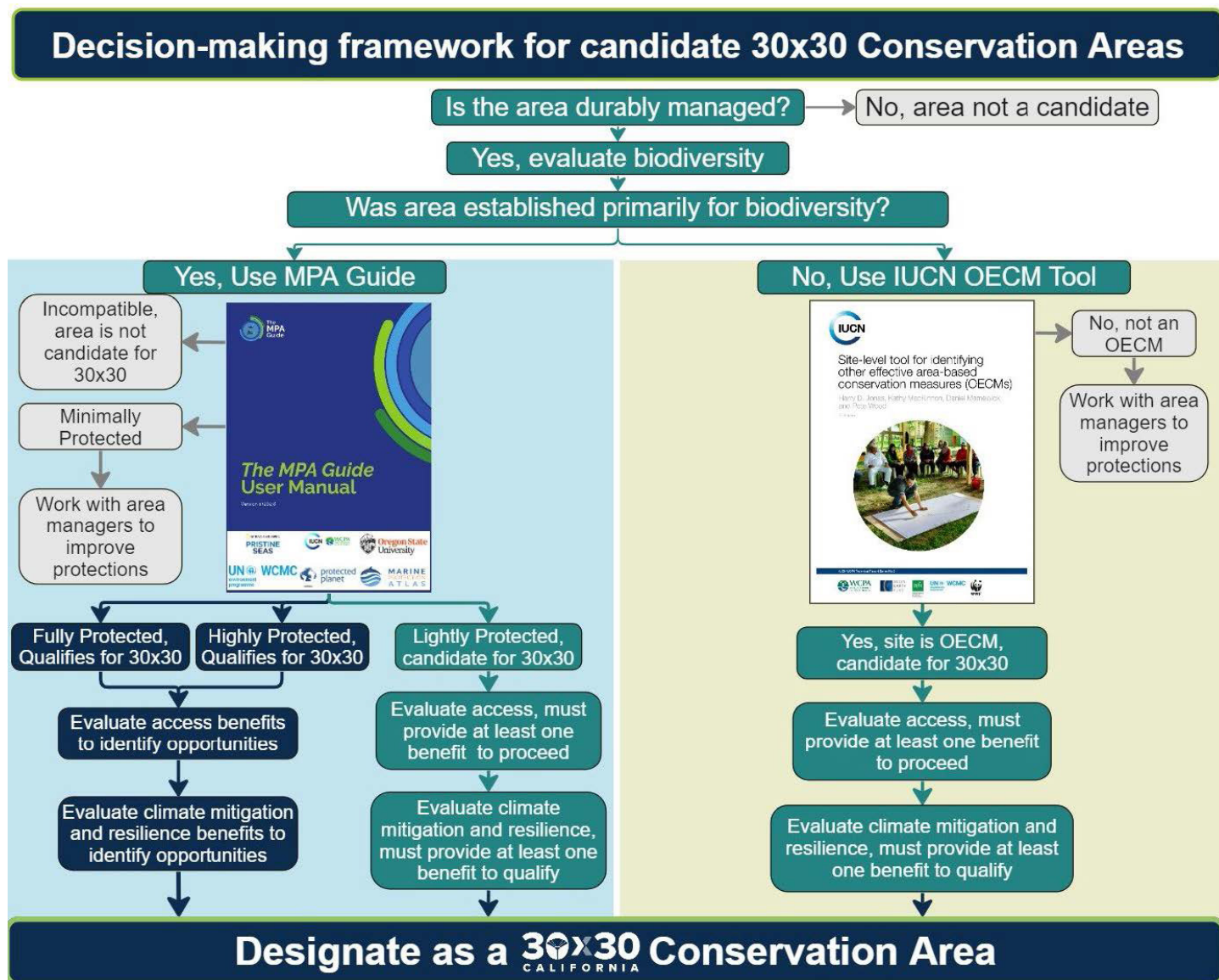


Figure 1. Draft Decision-making framework for candidate 30x30 Conservation Areas

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, fishing communities, and others as we move forward towards conserving 30% of coastal waters by 2030.

If you have comments on the Draft Decision-Making Framework, please submit them to 30x30coastalwaters@resources.ca.gov by October 2, 2024