



**Staff Recommendation**

December 12, 2023

Item 9

**Action Item:**

**Consideration and Approval of Disbursement of Funds to the California Ocean Science Trust for Science Advisor Activities**

Justine Kimball, Senior Climate Change Program Manager

**Recommended Action:** Authorization to disburse up to \$1,325,000 to the California Ocean Science Trust (OST) to support Science Advisory Team (SAT) Secretariat activities through 2025 and establish a Task Force to lead the development of California coast and ocean health indicators.

**Location:** Statewide

**Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives:** 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, Target 3.6.1: Create an annual California State of the Coast and Ocean Report starting in 2021 (highlighting Strategic Plan implementation progress and critical issues) and a Report Card by 2025 (utilizing a scientific, indicator-based approach to grading the State of California’s Coast and Ocean); Goal 4: Support Ocean Health Through a Sustainable Blue Economy

**Equity and Environmental Justice Considerations:** The Science Advisory Team (SAT) provides a conduit to effectively engage a diversity of scientific perspectives and expertise. This project will support an update to SAT membership and composition to reflect a range of subject matter disciplines, institutions, knowledge types, tribal expertise, and Traditional Ecological Knowledges.

**Findings and Resolution:**

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibit(s), OPC hereby finds that:

1. The proposed projects are consistent with the purposes of Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, the California Ocean Protection Act;
2. The proposed projects are consistent with the Budget Act of 2022 which included a \$50 million General Fund appropriation for grants or expenditures for resilience projects that conserve, protect, and restore marine wildlife and healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems; and
3. The proposed projects are not ‘legal projects’ that trigger the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Public Resources Code section, section 15378.”

Staff further recommends that OPC adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 35500 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“OPC hereby approves the disbursement of up to \$1,325,000 to the California Ocean Science Trust (OST) to continue to support Science Advisory Team Secretariat (SAT) activities and establish a Task Force to lead the development of California coast and ocean health indicators.

This authorization is subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of funds, OST shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Director of the OPC detailed work plans, schedules, staff requirements, budgets, and the names of any contractors intended to be used to complete the projects, as well as discrete deliverables that can be produced in intervals to ensure the projects are on target for successful completion. All projects will be developed under a shared understanding of process, management and delivery.”

### **Executive Summary:**

As Science Advisor, OST will work to refresh OPC SAT membership and purpose, establish new institutional/organizational level partnerships with California’s scientific community, and initiate new processes to effectively engage diverse scientific perspectives and expertise. Additionally, as a priority area of focus, OST will lead a science Task Force in the development of a Coast and Ocean Report Card for launch in 2025, and will work across the scientific community and stakeholders to continue to strengthen the delivery of actionable, pragmatic scientific syntheses, roadmaps and recommendations on key issues including advancing 30x30 in state coastal waters, marine restoration and mitigation, and climate resilient fisheries, among other emerging topics, through the lens and to inform management of California coastal and marine ecosystems for the benefit of all Californians.

## Project Summary:

### Background:

Since 2007, OST has served as Science Advisor to OPC, to deliver pragmatic and actionable scientific advice and information to catalyze and support policy and management action for the purpose of protecting and preserving California's coast and ocean resources. Assembly Bill 1056 (Chapter 372, Statutes of 2007), the California Ocean Protection Act (COPA), also required that OPC establish a "science advisory team of distinguished scientists to assist it in meeting the purposes of the [California Ocean Protection Act]." The OPC Science Advisor was authorized to serve as co-chair of the SAT and oversee its creation. The first SAT was officially established in February 2008 to help meet the goals of the COPA and since that time OST has served to convene, govern, and manage this body. The SAT, OPC, and OST partnership has been proven as a model for strengthening the application of cutting-edge science to recommendations and solutions in state decision-making. Recent efforts include a science framework to guide the nation's first microplastics strategy, updated science to support sea-level rise adaptation and planning, and recommendations to guide investments in ocean acidification monitoring that build-upon existing monitoring and data collection programs.

This project builds upon that proven partnership to best support the goals of the COPA and the OPC Strategic Plan to Protect California's Coast and Ocean 2020–2025. As Science Advisor, OST will work to refresh SAT membership and purpose, and establish new institutional/organizational level partnerships with California's science community, and new processes to effectively engage a diversity of scientific perspectives and expertise. Through this project, OST will work across the scientific community and stakeholders to continue to strengthen the delivery of actionable, pragmatic scientific syntheses, roadmaps and recommendations on key issues including 30x30 in state coastal waters, marine restoration and mitigation, and climate resilient fisheries, among other emerging topics, through the lens and for the benefit of diverse and relevant stakeholder communities. Post-pandemic, there is a need to creatively envision updated, efficient mechanisms to engage California's deep scientific expertise in the creation of actionable science solutions that meet the urgency of the moment as climate change impacts increase along California's coast and in the marine environment.

Additionally, in 2023, OST led a process with the SAT to identify a comprehensive list of potential indicators to track the status of California's coast and ocean, and inform future monitoring and data collection statewide. As a priority area of focus, this project builds on that effort to lead a science Task Force in the development of a Coast and Ocean Report Card scheduled to be launched in 2025. OST and the Task Force will work collaboratively with OPC, state and federal agencies, and the scientific community to develop a partnership-based and durable report card for

the purposes of evaluating the health of California’s coast and ocean ecosystems and informing the California public on the status and trends of key coastal, marine, and social indicators.

### **Project Summary:**

This project will accomplish the following objectives:

1. Refresh the role, purpose, and membership of the Science Advisory Team to strengthen OPC partnerships with research centers, initiatives and institutions, and strengthen the role of the scientific community in accelerating progress on state policy priorities;
2. Work across the scientific community, tribes and the public to continue strengthening the delivery of actionable, pragmatic scientific syntheses, roadmaps, and recommendations on key issues including 30x30 in state coastal waters, marine restoration and mitigation, and climate resilient fisheries, among other emerging topics, through the lens and for the benefit of diverse and relevant California stakeholder communities;
3. Collaboratively produce a science-based Ocean and Coast Report Card that supports tracking of ocean and coastal conditions and guides future statewide monitoring and data collection efforts.

### **Equity and Environmental Justice Considerations:**

As part of the work to refresh SAT membership and purpose, incorporating equity, environmental justice, and tribal perspectives is a key priority. This project will advance the OPC Equity Plan objective 4.3 to “[e]mbed representation, consultation, and engagement of environmental justice communities and California Native American tribes in OPC’s science and research” through actions including but not limited to conducting an assessment of the demographic composition of the SAT, SAT expertise across Strategic Plan goals, and to identify barriers in establishing a more diverse advisory team. This project will additionally strengthen the SAT by expanding expertise across a range of disciplines, knowledge types, tribal expertise, and Traditional Ecological Knowledges.

Additionally, as part of the 2025 Ocean and Coast Report Card effort, the science Task Force will coordinate with the [Environmental Justice Advisory Group](#), facilitated by Better World Group, to inform relevant indicators to assess the health of California’s coast and ocean ecosystems, including impacts to human uses and communities.

### **About the Grantee:**

OST is a nonprofit public-benefit corporation under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and was established pursuant to the California Ocean Resources Stewardship Act of 2000 to encourage coordinated, multi-agency, multi-institution approaches to translating ocean science to

management and policy applications. OST bridges the gap between cutting edge scientific research and sound ocean management, accelerating progress towards a healthy and productive ocean future for California. As a nonprofit partner to OPC, OST’s strength lies in nimble response to state priorities: leveraging resources and creating partnerships to foster innovative yet pragmatic approaches to difficult problems.

**Project Timeline:**

January 2024 – December 2025

**Project Financing:**

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) authorize encumbrance of up to \$1,325,000 to California Ocean Science Trust to serve as Science Advisor, support Science Advisory Team Secretariat activities, and establish a Task Force to lead the development of indicators.

Ocean Protection Council	\$1,325,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,325,000</b>

The anticipated source of funds will be from the Budget Act of 2022, which included a \$50 million General Fund appropriation to OPC for grants or expenditures for resilience projects that conserve, protect, and restore marine wildlife and healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems. The proposed disbursement is an appropriate use of this General Fund appropriation because this project will provide information needed to increase the State’s understanding and inform future investment towards effectively addressing climate impacts on California coast and ocean resources.

**Consistency with California Ocean Protection Act:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Ocean Protection Act, Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, because it is consistent with trust-fund allowable projects, defined in Public Resources Code Section 35650(b)(2) as projects which:

- Improve the management of fisheries and/or foster sustainable fisheries.
- Allow for increased public access to, and enjoyment of, ocean and coastal resources, consistent with sustainable, long-term protection and conservation of those resources.

- Improve management, conservation, and protection of coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.
- Provide monitoring and scientific data to improve state efforts to protect and conserve ocean resources.
- Provide funding for adaptive management, planning coordination, monitoring, research, and other necessary activities to minimize the adverse impacts of climate change on California's ocean ecosystem.

### **Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA):**

The various proposed projects are not considered 'legal projects' that trigger the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21068 and Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, section 15378. If any were determined to be a 'legal project' under CEQA, the proposed project(s) are categorically exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306 because the projects involve information collection, consisting of data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource.