



Informational Item

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Item 6

Tribal Nature-Based Solutions Grant Program

Anh L. Diep, OPC 30x30 Program Manager

Location: Northern Coast (Mendocino County) and Central Coast (San Luis Obispo County)

Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives: Goal 1: Safeguard Coastal and Marine Ecosystems and Communities in the Face of Climate Change; Objective 1.3: Improve Understanding of Climate Impacts on California’s Coast and Ocean. Goal 2: Advance Equity Across Ocean and Coastal Policies and Actions; Objective 2.1: Enhance Engagement with Tribes. Goal 3: Enhance Coastal and Marine Biodiversity Objective; 3.1: Protect and Restore Coastal and Marine Ecosystems. Goal 4: Support Ocean Health Through a Sustainable Blue Economy; 4.2: Promote Sustainable Aquaculture.

Equity and Justice Considerations:

In support of OPC’s Strategic Plan Goal 2 (Advance Equity Across Ocean and Coastal Policies and Actions) and Objectives 2.1 (Enhance Engagement with Tribes), this funding will advance benefits to California Native American tribes which include, but are not limited to: capacity building through direct funding for tribes; improved tribal access to the coast and ocean; improved participation of tribes in research, monitoring, and restoration project planning; increased tribal workforce development opportunities; and increased opportunities for tribal stewardship of ancestral lands and waters.

Further, these projects help OPC advance commitments made within the Tribal Engagement Strategy to support tribal priorities for the coast and ocean, including but not limited to: supporting existing tribal programs; restoration of culturally important habitat and species; improving tribal access to coast and ocean; supporting tribal customary use of coastal and ocean resources.

Executive Summary:

In January 2023, the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) adopted a first-of-its-kind [Tribal Engagement Strategy](#) to enhance collaboration with California Native American tribes on coastal and ocean

issues. To support implementation of this Strategy, [OPC committed up to \\$1 million](#) to provide dedicated funding to support and advance tribes' priorities to restore culturally important habitats and species, improve tribal access to the coast and ocean, and support tribally-led stewardship.

To deliver on this commitment, OPC is awarding up to \$500,000 each to Kai Poma, a tribal non-profit representing 3 tribes, and to the ytt Northern Chumash Nonprofit representing the yak tit'Yu tit'Yu yak tiłhini (ytt) Northern Chumash Tribe in support of Tribal Nature-Based Solutions (TNBS) projects on California's coast. This investment comes as part of a [larger commitment](#) by Governor Gavin Newsom to award up to \$107.7 million through the [Tribal Nature-Based Solutions Grant Program](#) for 34 projects statewide that support tribal priorities related to ancestral land return, restoration, workforce development, implementation of traditional knowledges, and climate resilience.

Background:

Native peoples have inhabited and stewarded the lands and waters now known as California since time immemorial. California Native American tribes have distinct cultural, spiritual, environmental, economic, and public health interests, and hold unique rights, perspectives, and knowledges relating to California's natural resources. Unfortunately, through violence, exploitation, and dispossession perpetrated by the state, tribal communities were forcefully separated from their ancestral territories and cultural practices. In spite of this, tribes have never ceded their traditions and obligation to steward the lands and waters.

In June 2019, in an effort to begin addressing these wrongs, Governor Gavin Newsom issued [Executive Order N-15-19](#) which formally acknowledges the many instances of violence, mistreatment and neglect inflicted upon California Native Americans throughout the state's history and formally apologizes on behalf of the state to California Native Americans. This order also led to the creation of the tribally-led, consultation-informed [Truth and Healing Council](#) to address these issues. Additionally, in September 2020, Governor Newsom released a [Statement of Administration Policy on Native American Ancestral Lands](#). This policy statement encourages state entities to seek opportunities to support tribes' co-management of, access to, and return of natural lands that are within a tribe's ancestral land and under the ownership or control of the State of California.

Establishment of Tribal Nature-Based Solutions (TNBS) Grant Program

The TNBS Grant Program was developed in response to input received from California Native American tribes during consultations on Governor Newsom’s [Executive Order N-82-20](#) (Nature-Based Solutions Executive Order), as well as California’s [Pathways to 30x30 Strategy](#) and [Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy](#). The TNBS Program and grant funds are part of this commitment and were made available to assist California Native American tribes in advancing multi-benefit nature-based solutions priorities for their communities. Meaningful partnership with tribes is essential for reaching California’s state goal of conserving 30% of lands and coastal waters by 2030 and addressing the climate and biodiversity crisis.

In January 2023, OPC approved the disbursement of up to \$1 million to establish a Tribal Small Grants Program to provide dedicated funding to California Native American tribes and tribally led entities in support of work that advances tribes’ priorities for conservation, management, and stewardship, as well as the goals in [OPC’s Strategic Plan](#) and [Tribal Engagement Strategy](#). This funding was integrated into the larger TNBS Program to reduce the administrative burden on tribes and support the advancement of multi-benefit nature-based solutions in the coast and ocean. Grants of various sizes were made available to tribes through the TNBS Grant Program. Funding for Planning Grants ranged from a minimum of \$50K with a maximum of \$1M to support the diverse range of funding requests, including small grants. Implementation Grants ranged from a minimum of \$200K to a maximum of \$5M, and Ancestral Land Return Grants ranged from a minimum of \$200K to a maximum of \$10M.

Application Submission and Review Process

The TNBS Grant Program opened for preliminary application submission in late July 2023 with proposals due by September 2023. Competitive and eligible applicants were invited to submit full proposal applications due in late February 2024. Final submitted applications were reviewed by a multidisciplinary team of CNRA agency staff and outside technical experts through a structured review and evaluation process. The TNBS program received strong interest for projects along the coast: of the final 44 applications submitted to the TNBS program, 14 cited explicit goals and activities to advance coast and ocean health. These 14 applications totaled \$50.62 million in requested funding, ranging from \$400K to the maximum \$10M. Further, no applicant requested funding below \$250,000 across the program, and the 14 coast and ocean relevant applications averaged \$3.9M across the 3 grant categories in requested funding. This demand demonstrates the significant interest for dedicated funds to advance tribally-led nature-based solutions work and ancestral land return within California’s coast and ocean.

Projects Awarded:

Blues Beach Management Project

Project Description:

OPC funding will support Kai Poma in developing a robust management plan for the Blues Beach property, 136.2 acres of tribal ancestral land located approximately 1 mile south of Westport and 11 miles north of Fort Bragg in Mendocino County. Pursuant to Section 118.9 of Streets and Highway Code (SB 231), Caltrans is required to return the property to Kai Poma and future stewardship and maintenance of the property will be undertaken by Kai Poma. Funding will support planning to preserve critical habitat and cultural resources, enhance climate resilience and coastal biodiversity, and promote use of Traditional Ecological Knowledge through tribally-led stewardship.

Proposed Project Activities:

The goal of the project is to develop comprehensive restoration plans which will integrate ecological restoration efforts and cultural activities with the aim to increase biodiversity, restore habitats, and improve wildfire resilience. Supporting activities include baseline condition assessments of cultural and ecological resources on the property; consultations with tribal experts regarding land management practices; engagement with local and tribal communities, including youth and elders; grant preparation to build internal tribal capacity for pursuing future grant funding opportunities; and workforce development through hiring personnel and preparing internal structure for project management and land stewardship.

About the Grantee:

Kai Poma is a tribally chartered nonprofit representing three federally recognized tribes: Coyote Valley Band of Pomo Indians, Sherwood Valley Band of Pomo Indians, and Round Valley Indian Tribes. The three tribes represent a diverse confederation of Native peoples of the region: Northern Pomo, Yuki, Wailacki, Concow, Little Lake Pomo, Nomlacki, and Pit River. Kai Poma was formed for the restoration and management of the Blues Beach property. All of Kai Poma's Board members are delegates from these tribes, ensuring that the project resonates with the core values, insights, and traditions of these tribes.

Project Timeline:

This project will be completed over two years (Summer 2024 to Spring 2026).

Funding Award:

\$500,000

yat Spasini yak Tspu Conservancy

Project Description:

ytt Northern Chumash Tribe is partnering with The Land Conservancy of San Luis Obispo, Harmony Coast Aquaculture Institute, and Creek Lands Conservation to develop and implement a conservation and economic development plan, which includes planning for future ancestral land return of the 357-acre, Alexander Ranch property in Cayucos, located in San Luis Obispo County. OPC funding will support capacity building, development of an estuarine and creek conservation plan and a tribally-led aquaculture development plan, which includes restoration planning for culturally important coastal species, California’s native abalone species.

Proposed Project Activities:

The goal of the project is to build tribal capacity for future ancestral land return and develop two comprehensive plans: a Villa Creek and Estuary Restoration plan, which will utilize Traditional Ecological Knowledge for the restoration of creek, wetland, and estuarine habitat for biodiversity protections, climate resilience, and carbon sequestration, and a tribal-led Aquaculture Development Plan, which will support the restoration of multiple native abalone, a coastal invertebrate species of cultural importance to the tribe. Other activities will include capacity building through workforce recruitment and training in preparation for property acquisition for ancestral land return, completion of grant applications for land acquisition funding, and local and tribal community engagement.

About the Grantee:

ytt Northern Chumash Nonprofit is the yak tit’u tit’u yak tihini (ytt) Northern Chumash Tribe’s legal entity, established in in 2010 for the sole purpose to support tribal activities and to act as the legal entity for the tribe. (ytt) Northern Chumash Tribe is on the California Native American Heritage Commission list of Tribes affiliated with San Luis Obispo County. In the 1700’s the Spanish colonists identified and grouped 8 distinct tribal nations together and label them the Chumash nation, the Spanish name for the tribal nation that surrounded current day Mission San Luis Obispo (San Luis Obispo County). ytt has never accepted this Spanish given name and instead continues to identity as the tihini tribal nation.

Project Timeline:

This project will be completed over two years (Summer 2024 to Fall 2026).

Funding Award:

\$500,000

Consistency with California Ocean Protection Act

The proposed projects are 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:

- Eliminate or reduce threats to coastal and ocean ecosystems, habitats, and species.
- 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.
- Protect, conserve, and restore coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.
- 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 proposed projects are statutorily exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations section 15262 as feasibility and planning studies. The awards may support recipient tribes in completing environmental assessments as required by CEQA and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Next Steps

OPC and the TNBS Grant Program team are in the process of meeting with awardees to discuss grant programming and finalize grant agreements for execution. OPC is committed to ongoing communication and partnership with the awardees to support the successful completion of these projects.

OPC is looking forward to enhancing communication and engagement with California Native American tribes and supporting future small grant opportunities to advance tribal priorities related to coastal and ocean health, tribal stewardship, and to support capacity building. OPC recognizes the importance of providing dedicated funding to advance tribal priorities and supporting capacity building opportunities for tribes. Lessons learned from the TNBS Grant Program will inform OPC's future approach to further support tribal stewardship and capacity building.