



Informational Items

June 4, 2024

Item 7

30x30 Decision-Making Framework for Coastal Waters

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Location: Statewide

Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives: This framework supports OPC strategic targets in 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; and Goal 3: Enhance Coastal and Marine Biodiversity. Specifically, within these objectives: Objective 1.3: Improve Understanding of Climate Impacts on California’s Coast and Ocean; Objective 2.1: Enhance Engagement with Tribes; Objective 2.2: Enhance Engagement with Underserved Communities; and Objective 3.1: Protect and Restore Coastal and Marine Ecosystems.

Exhibits:

Exhibit A: [30x30 Draft Decision-Making Framework for Coastal Waters](#)

Exhibit B: [The MPA Guide](#)

Exhibit C: [International Union for Conservation of Nature \(IUCN\) site-level tool for identifying other effective area-based conservation measures \(OECMs\)](#)

Executive Summary:

California’s 30x30 initiative will create and expand enduring conservation measures across a broad range of landscapes and seascapes to protect biodiversity, expand access to nature, and mitigate and build resilience to climate change. OPC is leading implementation of 30x30 in coastal waters. To provide scientific guidance and inform 30x30 implementation, OPC has partnered with the California Ocean Science Trust (OST) to convene a 30x30 Technical Advisory Panel. Understanding the biodiversity, access, and climate resilience benefits provided by marine managed areas can be complex. The international scientific community has been grappling with these challenges for many years and has developed robust tools for evaluating the effectiveness of marine protections,

including the MPA Guide ([Exhibit B](#)) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) site-level tool for evaluating other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) ([Exhibit C](#)). Adapting this international guidance, and guided by the Technical Advisory Panel, OPC has developed a draft science-based decision-making framework for evaluating and designating 30x30 Conservation Areas in coastal waters.

The presentation of this informational item will launch a 120-day public comment period on the draft decision-making framework which will include virtual webinars, in-person regional workshops, and discussion with key partners, including state and federal agencies. OPC will also offer opportunities for government-to-government consultation on the draft framework with California Native American tribes. Staff anticipates bringing a final framework to the Council for consideration and possible adoption at the December 9, 2024 Council meeting.

Background

In October 2020, Governor Newsom issued [Executive Order N-82-20](#), which advanced biodiversity conservation as an Administration priority and elevated the role of nature in fighting climate change. Part of this Order committed California to conserving 30% of its lands and coastal waters by 2030 (the “30x30” target) – putting California at the leading edge of an international movement to protect nature.

Currently, California’s coastal waters are a complex mosaic of overlapping marine managed areas that vary widely in purpose, level of protection, managing agency, and potential biodiversity benefits. In 2022, the California Natural Resources Agency released [Pathways to 30x30 \(Pathways\)](#), which defines conservation for the purposes of 30x30 and details strategies and opportunities for achieving the program’s goals. California’s statewide network of 124 marine protected areas (MPAs), which cover 16.2% of coastal waters, aligns with the definition of conservation set forth in *Pathways*. Conserving an additional half a million acres of coastal waters by 2030 will require action across four fronts: adaptively managing the state’s marine protected area (MPA) network; strengthening biodiversity conservation in National Marine Sanctuaries; supporting tribally led conservation through the creation of Indigenous Marine Stewardship Areas; and exploring the role of other spatial management measures to provide durable biodiversity benefits (e.g., areas established for the purposes of fisheries management or to improve water quality).

To provide scientific guidance on 30x30 implementation, OPC has partnered with the California Ocean Science Trust (OST) to convene a [30x30 Technical Advisory Panel](#). Members include leaders in marine ecology, fisheries, marine spatial planning, and environmental justice. Over the past six months, the panel has 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.

Decision-Making Framework

Understanding the biodiversity, access, and climate resilience benefits provided by marine managed areas can be complex. The international scientific community has grappled with these challenges for many years and has developed robust tools for evaluating the effectiveness of marine protections, including The MPA Guide (Exhibit B) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) site-level tool for evaluating other effective area-based conservation measures (OECMs) (Exhibit C). OPC and the 30x30 Technical Advisory Panel have integrated both resources into a decision-making framework tailored to California. The framework further relies on additional guidance specific to California, including reports of the OPC Science Advisory Team and lessons learned from the first decadal management review of California’s MPA network.

Durability: A key consideration in evaluating any area for 30x30 begins with durability. For the purposes of 30x30, as defined in *Pathways*, 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 are considered durable in coastal waters.

Acknowledging the diversity and complexity of marine managed areas in California, the framework then provides guidance both for areas established explicitly for the purposes of biodiversity conservation (e.g. California’s MPA network, National Marine Sanctuaries) as well as areas established for purposes other than biodiversity conservation (e.g. areas established to protect water quality or promote the recovery of depleted fish stocks).

Areas Established Primarily for Biodiversity Conservation: For areas that were established primarily for the purposes of biodiversity conservation, including California’s MPA network and National Marine Sanctuaries, biodiversity protections will be evaluated using the MPA Guide. Article 2 of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) defines a protected area as “a geographically defined area, which is designated or regulated and managed to achieve specific conservation objectives.” The MPA Guide is a science-based, policy-relevant framework to help understand, evaluate, and plan marine protected areas (MPAs) and assess their expected outcomes for nature and people. MPAs that are fully or highly protected, such as California’s State Marine Reserves, will automatically qualify as 30x30 Conservation Areas, as science indicates that fully or highly protected areas have the greatest potential to protect biodiversity, confer resilience, and benefit populations and ecosystems. MPAs that are lightly protected may still qualify if they

provide significant access and climate resilience benefits. Areas that are minimally protected or allow any activity incompatible with biodiversity conservation will not qualify.

Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs): For areas that were created for primary reasons other than conservation, biodiversity protections will be evaluated using the IUCN OECM Site Level Tool tailored for California. An OECM is defined by the United Nations as a “geographically defined area other than a Protected Area, which is governed in and managed in ways that achieve positive and sustained long-term outcomes for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity.” Potential OECMs in California include water quality protected areas and area-based fisheries management measures. These areas can also play a critical role in connecting the seascape between fully and highly protected MPAs. Evaluation of these areas offers a significant opportunity to recognize the effective long-term conservation and durable protections that are taking place to protect habitats and species. The IUCN Site Level Tool evaluates potential OECMs on a case-by-case basis, examining the biodiversity and threats and pressures in an area, then evaluating outcomes to determine if management achieves conservation of nature as a whole. To qualify as 30x30 Conservation Areas in California, confirmed OECMs must also demonstrate that they promote both access to nature and climate mitigation or resilience.

Access and Climate: Managers must consider a broad range of community needs and priorities in designating 30x30 Conservation Areas, including creating safe and inclusive outdoor experiences, enabling tribal cultural and subsistence practices, and fostering active recreation including hunting, fishing, hiking, boating, and more. Science-driven, nature-based approaches, both traditional and western, must be expanded across the state to protect California from the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change while expanding equitable access to nature. *Pathways* identified conservation priorities to improve access and mitigate and build resilience to climate change. Building off those priorities and previous reports and evaluations in California, including a [report](#) by the OPC Science Advisory Team on climate resilience, the Technical Advisory Panel has developed guiding questions to evaluate the access and climate resilience and mitigation benefits of 30x30 candidate areas that are aligned with the priorities identified in *Pathways*.

This draft framework 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 fishermen.

Next Steps

The presentation of this informational item launches a 120-day public comment period on the draft framework, to conclude on October 2, 2024. Comments can be submitted via email to 30x30coastalwaters@resources.ca.gov. A robust public engagement process including virtual webinars and in-person regional workshops on this draft decision-making framework will take place this Summer to engage with community members and gather critical local insights and feedback on the draft evaluation criteria, discuss regional threats and pressures in coastal waters, and identify opportunities for strengthening and improving protections. Workshops will be held in Arcata, Monterey, and San Diego, and when finalized, details will be posted on OPC's [30x30 webpage](#). Alongside this process, OPC will begin engaging with federal, state and local managers of candidate areas.

In partnership with CNRA, OPC has requested an early consultation with California Native American tribes to inform the development of a strategy and toolkit to advance tribal access, co-management, and ancestral land return in California. Insights from this early consultation will inform OPC's approach and implementation of Indigenous Marine Stewardship Areas (IMSA) within state coastal waters. Building upon this early consultation, OPC is respectfully requesting a 120-day tribal consultation on the draft framework to ensure tribal priorities and perspectives are represented within the final document. Letters requesting consultation will be sent to tribal leadership in June 2024.

Following the public comment and tribal consultation periods, the decision-making framework will be finalized in consultation with OPC's Technical Advisory Panel this Fall. Strong collaboration with federal, state, and tribal partners, alongside meaningful engagement with coastal communities, will allow for a better understanding of threats and pressures facing coastal waters and will also identify opportunities to strengthen protections using the final framework to achieve California's 30x30 goals. Additionally, OPC anticipates gathering international feedback on the decision-making framework at the upcoming United Nations Biodiversity Conference in October 2024.

Preliminary evaluations for areas in coastal waters are expected to begin in late Fall and OPC will bring the final framework with potential preliminary determinations for 30x30 candidate areas to the Council for consideration and possible adoption at the December 9, 2024 Council meeting.